

# Libertarian Communist

July 1978

15p



**ON THE WAGES FRONT** Sunny Jim and his allies in the labour movement may have done a good job in restraining the justified anger of the working class. On the other hand, one of the most significant trends in the last year or so has been the rise in the number of struggles for union recognition. Workers at Grunwicks, DeSoutters, Trust Houses Forte, Garner Steak Houses and even Clardiges have all fought, or are fighting for the basic right to join a trade union. These struggles are taking place in industries, such as the hotel and catering industry, where the workers are traditionally low-paid, and where the high proportion of the workforce is female or black, or both. Many of these workers are now saying that they have had enough of being the most exploited section of the working class.



**WOMEN RECLAIM THE NIGHT!** Several hundred women marched through Soho last November as part of a nationwide confrontation with the exploitation of women as sexual objects. Taking over the streets at night in a challenge against male dominance, they denied the fear of molestation or rape, and spat on the image of women presented in the media. Together, women can be strong!



**SCAPEGOATS.** The working class of Merseyside are being singled out for special treatment by the ruling class. Workers at Lucas and Speke have been told that they must swell the dole queues so that the industrial giants can set their ledgers straight. Faced with the inability of the capitalists to find a market for their products, the workers at Lucas Aerospace and Leylands Speke have organised to prevent closure and have drawn up plans for the production of goods that are more socially useful.



**THE NATIONAL FRONT** during the last flurry of elections took over our schools and tried to keep ordinary people out of their "public meetings" with police aid. The reaction to these circuses was often quite firm and some authorities were pressured into banning them. We must organize in our groups, communities and organizations and in our local anti-racist and fascist cities, and in the ANL, to keep the pressure up over the coming months.

Photos by Laurence Sparham and Andrew Brand (Report) and Angela Phillips (IFL)

**CARRY  
ON  
THE  
FIGHT  
BACK!**

## Public Sector

## NUT MUST TRY HARDER



Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

AT THE moment there is a slight pause in the ideological battle that has been waged in education in the last three years or so. This is similar to the slight but perceptible lull that has occurred in other areas such as the struggles over cuts and wages.

The Tyndale teachers have finally lost their fight to be recognised by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). The Industrial Tribunal where they recently lost was the final body of appeal that they could turn to. Harvey Hinds, the senior ILEA official who resigned over the case, offered his support to the teachers but even that didn't help.

In the context of progressive methods, their sacking can only be described as a massive defeat for all those teachers who are concerned to stave off the right wing attempts, led by St John Stevas and Rhodes Boyson, to impose restrictions on what is taught.

That these ideological restrictions, such as more 'discipline', the elimination of mixed-ability groups, the narrowing down of choice in the curriculum and so on, go hand in hand to give an ideological veneer for education cuts is indisputable.

Obviously the Tyndale teachers are only a few of the large number of working-class orientated teachers concerned to fight for positive discrimination in favour of working-class kids. There are many lessons to be learnt from the affair, but two main ones stand out.

## Vague

First, the term progressive is a catch all phrase. Because of the vagueness of the Left over where education should be going it has become a convenient term of abuse for the right wing. It represents long-haired lazy revolutionaries, operating in scenes of rioting children, spreading red hate, whilst being out on strike! To protest that this ugly caricature is untrue is not

enough, as the Tyndale teachers found out.

What was needed was a coherent strategy for working-class education to rebut the Black Paper's arguments. It wasn't there. However many teachers are beginning to realise their mistakes and the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) has organised the first National Conference, of many hopefully, entitled "The Politics of Education". It will be a two-day conference on the 22nd and 23rd April, and many socialist educationalists have been invited, and workshops are being arranged. See elsewhere in the paper for full details.

The second major lesson of Tyndale is that sectarianism can damage any struggle. The teachers were suspicious of left groups at the start, and this prevented them making use of the resources that a network of socialist teachers could have given them. When, finally, the Defence Campaign was underway, the Socialist Workers Party's hostility to working with the STA undermined attempts to form a rounded socialist rebuttal of the right-wing smear.

The fightback against the Cuts and in particular the cuts in education has been muted recently. This stems partly from the National Union of Teachers' leadership's inability to organise a national fightback, and partly from its political support for the Labour Government.

Obviously, these two attitudes go hand in hand. The practical result is that in the eyes of the NUT only "bad" Local Education Authorities make education cuts, not the Government.

## Cuts

When a "bad" LEA makes cuts, the executive only grudgingly grants the right to take sanctions to the local NUT. These continue until either a face saving compromise is worked out between the NUT

Executive and the ILEA, or until the LEA moderates its cuts so that it is more in line with the cuts imposed by the other LEAs.

This disastrous attitude is entirely due to the Executive's social democratic view that 'under Thatcher it would be worse'. They have no conception of working with other public sector unions in a united fight against all cuts in social services. They refuse to let any enlightened members (unless they belong to an enlightened NUT branch) officially organising such action at grass roots level. The irony is that where the NUT Executive does tardily get off its arse and call strike action (as in Oxfordshire) it wins.

The fight for Public Sector Alliances has been conducted locally by teachers i.e. in East London and Tameside. To set them up requires a great sensitivity to the situation in the local labour movement. In some areas, where there is a strong Trades Council, it is wiser to make demands on this first and if they are rejected, then use that as a spur for a separate alliance.

The STA is fighting for a £1000

in places of work such as schools, different unions operate e.g. NUT, NUPE & TGWU. A working relationship between these branches is a sound prerequisite for a Public Sector Alliance.

## Pay

Teachers were awarded a restructuring of their pay in 1974-75 by the Government. The Houghton Report, whilst crystallising the unfair differentials between class and head teachers, did bring teachers pay into line with that of other skilled workers. Inflation has eaten away those gains, and like other groups of workers teachers are beginning to demand that they get back what they've lost. Most active NUT members believe that the 10% guidelines should be broken. The General Secretary of the NUT, Jarvis, supported the firmness at the TUC and the NUT has put in a 13% claim. This claim is way below what teachers should be demanding and it allows the NUT to make militant noises and settle for 10% later.

The STA is fighting for a £1000



Teachers Rally Against Racism

Photo: Mark Rutherford (IFL)

flat rate increase. The Communist Party is fighting for a 'restoration of differentials'!

This would mean that classroom teachers would get 8.8% and senior and headteachers would get 35%. The STA believes along with the rest of the left that a flat rate claim would unite all teachers. A percentage claim, apart from its divisive nature, provides an easy get out for the Executive in that they could get 10% overall and redistribute it internally so that some teachers would, at the expense of others, get more than 10%.

## Racialism

The National Front are organising a National Youth Section. So far, its the case that the media have given an inflated impression of its size and organisation. 'Spot a Red Teacher' leaflets have so far appeared in only a few schools.

At a national level the NUT has confined itself to "fighting" for a multiracial curriculum. Ex-Communist Party member Max Morris led the right wing's successful fight not to affiliate the union to the TUC's motion on racialism at last year's NUT Conference. However

## The fight

IN COMMON with other teachers in the country, Humberide teachers have faced crippling cuts in the education budget in the last two years.

November 1976 - The Labour administration of Humberide proposed £2 million cuts for 1977-8 with a 'promise' of £15 million to follow in 1978-9.

December 1976 - We were then threatened with the loss of 287 jobs. Although there was some concern about the full implications. Many had been fooled by the myth that "there was plenty of 'fat' which could be trimmed off the education budget, many being wasted-of course never by themselves."

Indeed there had previously been a closely fought battle within the NUT as to whether we should negotiate over the cuts, which to many seemed like discussing the relative merits of hanging or shooting with your executioner!

Hull teachers voted against negotiation, but Humberide teachers as a whole, coming from largely rural areas, voted in favour. These teachers were shocked by the sudden announcement that so many jobs were to be lost, and began to wonder just where their negotiating had got them.

Humberide NUT voted to impose the three day no cover sanction (which means that we would refuse to look after an absent teacher's classes after three days!).

## No cover

We were backed by the National "Action" Committee of the NUT, which had been, and still is, so often the grave of so much militancy.

We were all set to go ahead (and indeed the NAS-UNT had already started in selected schools) when (surprise, surprise!) the "inevitable" staffing cuts were suddenly discovered to be avoidable, and the £2 million cuts were reduced to £1¼ million.

However: this was not the victory



## Public Sector

## BUILD A PUBLIC SECTOR ALLIANCE

Public services in this country are under vicious attack from the employing class. Resources are being turned away from the 'Social Wage' into the paying off of government debts and the provision of grants to industry.

It is working class people who feel the effects of this process, both as users of the services and as workers employed in them.

Unfortunately, public sector workers who attempt to protect either their living standards or the level of services are often subjected to the most hypocritical abuse by the ruling class. The authorities attempt to obscure their general responsibility and their intransigence in negotiations by blaming the workers for any inconvenience or suffering associated

with the need for industrial action in the public sector. In most cases, however, public sector workers have difficulty in winning grievances when their action does not immediately affect the employers' profits.

Only realisation of the common interests of the working class and of how the current crisis is an attack on the working class as a whole can provide a basis for the unity and solidarity necessary for successful resistance.

Such unity will not be built easily. Nor will it be the result of a single, simple process. Two elements will however, be of special importance. First, the growth of unified action amongst public sector workers themselves, and their creation of a common strategy for the public sector as a whole. Second,

in the support of the wider labour movement for this process and its contribution to the achievement of a workers plan for the services involved.

Alongside the ever-present task of solidarity with workers in struggle require understanding of the social processes at work and of the general objectives required by the workers movement—objectives for the particular services for the public sector as a whole.

In this issue our Public Sector Alliance pages concentrate on the National Health Service. In our next issue we hope to cover what's happening in education. If you have information about the struggle in this sector, or indeed about any other aspect of the public sector, please contact us so that we may consider it for inclusion in the paper.

issues of democracy in the union, and the struggle for women's rights in teaching have not been mentioned. However *Libertarian Communist* does hope to cover these in future education reports. Your contributions on this subject are of course, very welcome.

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hold a mass rally of teachers in Central Hall on the evening of March 16th. STA members are arguing that after the rally an ongoing national organisation should be set up.

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events have moved faster than Morris, and teachers are finding that they are going to have to affiliate to local anti-racist committees to counter this threat.

In London all the left groups have got together to form the All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism group. They plan to

## HULL SOCIALIST TEACHERS

THE GROUP started in 1971 as a Rank and File group, and built up a good deal of support locally.

After a growing disillusionment with the politics of Rank and File, particularly the lack of democracy, we changed our name in 1975 to Hull Socialist Teachers Group, and were active in the formation of the Socialist Teachers Alliance.

About 20 people regularly attended our meetings where we plan future action and tactics, although many other people actively support us at Union meetings, and rely on us for initiatives such as proposing motions.

There is a fairly broad spectrum of political views within the group, including non-aligned socialists, Labour, Left and Libertarian Communists.

We have been very successful at winning motions at Union meetings. We have, for example passed strong motions on Chile, socialism, cuts, the Working Women's Charter, and salaries for National Conference and have helped to initiate most of the action which the Union has taken locally for the past few years.

We have also played a very active role in the STA, both regionally and nationally. We organised a very successful regional conference around the Tyndale issue in 1977 which attracted quite a few teachers who had not previously been involved in the STA.

Since so few new teachers are being employed expanding the group is not easy. We have decided to hold regular meetings on broader educational issues in the hope of drawing more teachers towards socialist politics and union activity so that we can continue to be an effective force locally and nationally.

## JOINT ACTION

A HULL Public Sector Action Committee was set up in 1977 on the initiative of members of the Socialist Teachers Group, and with the support of Hull NUT.

We started by approaching representatives of NALGO and NUPE with a view to holding a preliminary meeting to gauge support. After this first meeting we decided to broaden the Joint Union Liaison Committee, as it is called, to include all the public sector unions, and invitations were sent out for an inaugural meeting.

We were very disappointed at the lack of response from other unions. Representatives from NALGO and COHSE have turned up occasionally, but the committee has really been held together by NUPE and NUT. So although meetings have been useful in comparing experiences and monitoring the cuts we have not had the resources to organise a full scale campaign against the cuts.

## against cutbacks

which it might mean, since to pay for this generosity in staffing we had to accept a 25% cut in capitation, which is money used to buy virtually everything laid in schools, from books to paper towels.

Unfortunately many teachers were so relieved to have saved the jobs that they did not or would not, see the disastrous implications for an education service limping on ever more inadequate resources.

More and more kids now have to share books, and are not allowed to take them home—original and exciting work is being stifled by lack of money.

But even then the battle was far from over. The next line of attack

was on our school meals.

Most teachers believe that the Government is aiming to destroy the school meals service, by raising the prices to a level which few can really afford, and then pretending that more people will be able to claim free meals, often a very humiliating and complex procedure.

Humberide decided to knock another nail in the coffin by demanding that only 25% of teachers in any school should receive a "free" school meal.

Now anyone who has eaten school food in a canteen of between 200 and 500 lively kids knows that it is not money for jam! It had always been understood that eating with the

kids, and thus taking responsibility for what went on, entitled you to a meal, although most teachers also did some other sort of dinner duty. Previously schools had made their own arrangements depending on their particular needs, and this blanket cut infuriated most teachers.

Many Local Associations (our equivalent to branches) decided to call for a complete withdrawal from dinner duties and other out of school activities. This would have meant many schools having to close completely at lunchtimes.

However, again, just before the action was to start, Humberide NUT, along with the headteachers' union, invoked the Collective Disputes Procedure, which meant that the whole issue went to Arbitration, and meanwhile everything stayed as it was... except that they took another 10% of our capitation until



it was settled!

## Progress

That was the situation when the Tories swept to power in April 1977, although Hull remained solidly Labour. When announcing their estimates for 1978-9 they very impudently said that everyone should be pleased as they were going along with Labour Government guidelines on cuts!

But of course the Labour councillors suddenly realised how disastrous cuts really were, and spoke with fiery eloquence against them. We would, however, have been more impressed if they'd said the same when in power!

So the figure of £2½ million is being banded about, staffing cuts are in store, the Arbitration Tribunal on dinner has proposed that each school be asked to make cuts (and we still lose the 10% capitation!).

Humberide NUT has asked the Action Committee for permission to implement the Union's class size policy (which means that in some schools teachers will refuse to take over-sized classes) and to hold half day strikes in areas which want them.

But somehow it all seems frighteningly familiar... Didn't we fight this battle last year too? How soon will it be before we're back to teaching classes of 60 with plates in their hands! Did we once hear something about progress?



Manchester NUT protest against cuts. Photo: John Sainsbury 1978.1

## Editorial

# Workers' democracy -no substitutes!

A class in the widest sense is a group defined by the fact that its members share specific selected characteristics. The importance of any particular classification depends upon the extent to which the selected or observed common characteristics determine the experience of life, or the way of living, of the individuals concerned.

You could, for instance, talk about a class of red-haired people. This classification would not be very important, however, because having red hair would affect the development of the individuals concerned very little compared with other factors. If, on the other hand, the characteristics chosen for purposes of classification should be "one-leggedness", then each of the individuals concerned would be more surely influenced in their living, and in a common way, by this common feature.

The more a class of people share a characteristic which fundamentally determines their experience of life or their way of living, the more political needs of the class become apparent—needs which can be defined in common. It is impossible to sensibly complete the sentence "Red haired people need . . ." in a manner distinguishing the red heads from people with any other colour of hair. But we rapidly conclude that "One-legged people need . . ." assistance in getting about, false legs, wheel chairs, and so forth.

Politics is concerned with the characteristics and needs of individuals as members of society. In this area, the important characteristics are those relating to different roles in the social

organisation of labour, to different shares in the social product and to differences in ability to influence the relevant authorities and establishment of social priorities. For us, the two latter areas flow out of the first, which makes this the key area of classification.

## Property

In capitalism as a type of social organisation of labour, the working class is characterised by the broad dependence of the individuals in it upon the unequal exchange of the creative power of their humanity for wages. We are propertyless, whilst property stands in relation to us and increases itself through its purchase of us. This basis is like the metal core a sculptor uses to build a model of plaster or clay.

It is only by referring to it and by probing into its operation and consequences that we can hope to construct an understanding of the entire position of the working class in capitalism.

The political responses we represent by the majority of workers in contradiction to the definition of needs arising from the revolutionary assessment of the situation of the working class there exists an alternative—that of the people we call class-collaborationists and reformists.

In Britain, this class collaborationism is an important aspect of working-class opinion at every level. A critical point of expression occurs, however, in the behaviour and policies of its foremost propagandists—the leadership of the Labour Party and of the trade union.

## Libertarian Communist

Libertarian Communist is the paper of the Libertarian Communist Group. Because of our shortage of both human and financial resources it is necessary to restrict the paper to a bimonthly appearance.

We want Libertarian Communist to provide information and analysis to militants. We hope to provoke political debate amongst those sympathetic to libertarian ideas within the revolutionary movement in this country, and we hope from this to evolve a more precise libertarian communist strategy and advocate that within the working class.

This project needs ideas and information. It requires a much wider involvement of libertarian militants, both at the level of news of struggles and that of discussion and analytical pieces. We believe that an emphasis on theory is necessary in order to combat the failings of the libertarian movement in this country, but in addition theoretical development cannot take place in the absence of concrete struggles. Please contact the address below if you wish to be involved.

## OUR AIMS

1) We advocate the replacement of the capitalist market economy by a planned socialist economy directed by the workers according to their own needs through united and democratic organs or workers self-management.

2) We affirm that in fighting for such a solution no revolutionary organisation should seek to carry out a seizure of power independent of the united and democratic organs of the working class.

3) We affirm that we shall never

as an organisation seek a mandate to form a government, but will fight for the constant involvement of the workers in the democratic organs of the working class.

4) We place full confidence in and encourage the development of authentic organs of workers democracy as the organisations of the working class and of mass self-determination of labour.

5) As part of the process, however, we believe in being

consistently political and democratic. This means communicating with the workers movement in the context of first, that generalisations can be made concerning the social events involving us, and secondly, that we can do something about them. We seek to contribute to the working class's understanding of itself as a class, that is, proletarian in terms of accurate generalisations and specific social objectives.

6) We seek to contribute to the development of a tradition of the working-class movement of its understanding itself and its history firmly in terms of the growth of the potential for the mass self-determination of labour.



Unemployment in the catering industry has been a major feature of past years. Official union backing has gained many a secret to the TUCWU or CNUW during disputes such as those at Trust House Tura and Gainers. Yet, the union establishment always seeks to winch off" before evidence exposing its cowardice in Chelmsford is brought before the tribunal.

Let us turn principally towards the latter.

At a time when capitalism is manifesting itself in the form of declining real incomes, cuts in social services, unemployment, productivity schemes, speed ups, encroachments on shop agreements, and so forth (on top of its general character as an increasingly unsatisfactory productive arrangement), there is inevitable piecemeal working-class resistance. Throughout the field of industrial relations there are signs of conflict, but every case, however, where workers have encountered an intransigent employer, the union leaders and officials have been instrumental in a failure to secure victory. This has happened even where—as at Grunwick—the stakes have been pitted against the grievances the working class as a whole could raise.

Some disputes have been lost because the union leadership refused to throw the full weight of the union into the fray. The Disputes' fight for union recognition, for instance, ended upon a basis of "individual recognition" (also the "individualisation of the conveyor and a lack of arrangements for stewards").

Because the Executive Council of the AUEW refused to call upon the union members to back Disputers' parts. Again, in September last year, engineering workers in the London area of the Skewerbrook group of papers had their shop agreements smashed, after the AUEW executive had refused to call out engineers in the group's Manchester concern, preferring instead to allow them to assist management in a strike-breaking increase of the print run!

On other occasions, the crucial factor has been the question of the mobilisation of the wider labour movement in support of a particular group. This, alongside AFEX officials' concern to stamp down militancy on the picket line, has been a major factor in the Grunwick's dispute. In December the UPW actually went as far as to fine postal workers a total of £1,400 for their action in boycotting Grunwick's mail. FBU members were also to find the tradition of "Unity is Strength" all gas and no clout.

Despite other unions having 100% breaking claims lined up and the TUC being opposed to the pay "guidelines" the FBU found no other union willing to take combined action on the issue. Mind you, its own leaders didn't exactly wear themselves out

looking for it.

This lack of combativity of the union leadership amounts to more than a coincidence of personal inadequacies. The class collaborationists have a conscious political desire to stand for "moderation"—that is the restraining of mass struggles, allowing, in the final analysis, of capital to carve its necessary pound of flesh off the working class. They appear like broken fighters because they are frightened of the steps necessary to secure victory, frightened of the possibility that a victory won by thorough mobilization of a union or of the wider labour movement will encourage others to struggle and establish clear precedents for the organisation of struggle. They are frightened of unleashing the power of the organised working class because they know in their hearts it will go on a collision course with capital, and they believe it (responsible and destructive for doing so. They believe that in the long run capitalism can run for the workers' benefit: even change itself into socialism.

This political understanding has been covertly behind the labour movement's leadership's relationship to workers in struggle, and is overtly behind the policies which sections of the leadership have openly fought for, such as wage control in the past, which has now been secured as a matter of course rather than policy, and the 12 month rule.

## History

Our criticism of such politics is that they do not draw inspiration from the fundamental social condition of the workers, that is why their advocates consequently oppose workers in struggle and accept attacks on the working class. Class collaboration has found its foundation in, and gained its credibility from, aspects of capitalism rather than from a convincing view of it as a whole. It relates partly to the fact that British capitalism has hitherto been indexed in certain respects a force for the advancement of its workers' living standards, and also partly to its early integration with the bourgeoisie of stable working class organisations.

It is significant, in fact, that the genesis of class collaborationist ideas in the British working class coincided with the first period of stabilisation of workers organisations in the 1850s. This decade was one in

## Gutless

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# Editorial

which new beginnings arose out of the shadow of defeat. On the one hand, the degeneration and failure of the Chartists and of the co-operative workshop movement, together with the dying down of the reversionary of the 1848 revolutions seemed to indicate a grim fate for the grandiose working class aspirations. On the other, despite its share of hard fought trade disputes and exile on the hard nature of working class life, the decade was one in which the general conditions of workers was beginning to show some signs of increased prosperity.

This was particularly the case for the new cohorts of engineers and skilled workers who were beginning to work in the construction trades, formed the basis for a new working class leadership. It was this leadership which both found the confidence of the workers at trade union and political leaders and absorbed to a certain degree the ideas of the bourgeois economists to produce the beginnings of a stable class-collaborationist current in the workers movement. The social revolutionary predictions of previous working class political movements tended to become eclipsed by a less ambitious species of reform politics and by the development of trade, welfare, and educational organisations.

The social shift towards class collaboration in this period was the beginning of a dominance—or, at least, decisive influence—which has lasted to the present day. In some periods, such as during the pre-World War I syndicalist movement, class collaboration was severely threatened. But even then, however, that it has held out.

## Developments

British workers living in a metropolitan country, have repeatedly known material improvement in their lifetimes, even if they have also repeatedly known poverty, hardship and war. The first birthpangs of the world revolution in underdeveloped countries, and to a certain extent the response of its leadership, has meant that in terms of political and material achievement we have been judged by many not to match up to the standards of the capitalist heartlands.

Finally, the emergence of a working class leadership of a class collaborationist nature has itself had a retrograde influence on the development of struggle and hence a reinforcement by the bureaucratic leadership of the labour movement—itsself partly a response to the view of metropolitan leaders as being "responsible" representatives of labour in the councils of the nation. In it lies from this comes the material perks.)

The obvious difference between the politics of class collaboration and those of socialism is that we understand capitalist production as being incapable of gradually escaping its subjection to those market forces and imperatives of capitalist accumulation which determine its essential contents. Our condition even in times of boom thus remains such that inequality, insecurity, exploitation, alienation and oppression are parts of social organisation which can only be removed by the abolition of capitalist productive relations. Of course, metropolitan capitalism has brought material benefits. But for how long will it be able to do this in the face of the revolt of those who milks dry in the underdeveloped countries? And how will it protect itself, or recover it from, its recurrent crises except off the backs of workers everywhere?

The final decision on the viability or otherwise of class collaboration rests with the working class—if not as a conscious social generalisation,

then in terms of reactions to life under capitalism. Our objective here, meanwhile, is to make clear that the actions of the present labour movement leadership and its political support for capital raise the issue of their class collaborationist basis.

But there is the other side of the coin: is the necessity for opposition to this leadership to be based clearly on class struggle?

## Policies

It is from this position that we must examine our policies and our alternatives for the fighting of disputes. We stand for wage agreements with automatic clauses to best inflation (according to working class calculation of the latter), for opposition to all redundancies and to unemployment (desiring instead working time on full pay in socially useful enterprises), for resistance to cuts in public expenditure and for an inflation proof programme of public services, etc. We argue for the use of the full

strength of the labour movement in support of workers in dispute, and for the development of "rank and file" organisations to press for this sort of action and to mobilise solidarity action independent of the bureaucrats when they stall and falter.

Finally, we fight for the trade unions to adopt structures which would make them truly combative organisations and rob the class bureaucrats when they stall and falter. Inflation proposals the following guidelines for such a reform of the trade unions:

- 1) All union officers to be elected on a mandatable and recallable basis. All to regularly stand for re-election, with a time limit for any individual to hold office.
- 2) Full time officers and employees to be paid the average rate of their union members, full time officers to be eventually replaced by

work has been the lack of national co-ordination between the local anti-racist committees. Recently, however, a national group has emerged, called the Anti-Nazi League. This falls into the danger I have mentioned. Although many people who helped with its creation would agree with what I said earlier, they cannot see this danger.

The problem is that anti-Nazi propaganda does not raise the political question of working class solidarity with ethnic minorities against capitalist interests. All it can do, and in fact does, is ally the working class elements with elements of the ruling class. Class politics is thrown out of the window.

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your fraternalism, John Barlowe.

## Letters

### Racism

Congratulations on the appearance of your new paper. There seems to be need for a paper like this for a long time, a paper which brings a deeper analysis of the problems of racism in the struggle and which develops libertarian ideas. The articles on the health service were a good example of the former and the discussion on Russia 1917 a good example of the latter. I was disappointed by the poor coverage of some very important issues, such as women and gays oppression. On the subject of racism, I would like to use

some of your space to point out a serious danger for socialists. That is the danger of making the main anti-racist campaign an anti-Nazi one.

Socialists know that racism is deeply rooted in the working class. This is expressed in the acceptance of immigration controls and the lack of support for ethnic groups fighting against racism in the state eg police harassment. The tasks of socialists is to support for ethnic groups fight against racism and for support for autonomous ethnic groups fighting it. Clearly this means more than crying out every time *Martin Luther King* moves. It means patient, persistent and determined work in the community and in the unions to expose racism in whatever form and to win workers round to an anti-racist programme. The main obstacle to anti-racist

and the appropriate analyses made. This emphasis would seem to call for a greater commitment to actual reporting. (Did you realise, for example, that six out of a total of eleven photographs, supplement apart, were of demonstrations.)

Reporting specific cases of injustices, etc, that is, I feel sure that because of the relevance to working class experience such reporting will increase your readership in this area. One last thought, in view of my comment regarding working-class readership, do you consider the name of your newspaper—*Libertarian Communist*—to be appropriate? yours faithfully M.Hard

### Boring

In the past I have found left-wing newspapers to be rather boring. However, being an optimist I read the *Libertarian Communist* half expecting to be pleasantly surprised. So to say I was somewhat disappointed. Despite a coherent front page article and an interesting supplement on Russia I was not particularly impressed by your newspaper. In order to be as responsive to the view of metropolitan leaders as being "responsible" representatives of labour in the councils of the nation. In it lies from this comes the material perks.)

The obvious difference between the politics of class collaboration and those of socialism is that we understand capitalist production as being incapable of gradually escaping its subjection to those market forces and imperatives of capitalist accumulation which determine its essential contents. Our condition even in times of boom thus remains such that inequality, insecurity, exploitation, alienation and oppression are parts of social organisation which can only be removed by the abolition of capitalist productive relations. Of course, metropolitan capitalism has brought material benefits. But for how long will it be able to do this in the face of the revolt of those who milks dry in the underdeveloped countries? And how will it protect itself, or recover it from, its recurrent crises except off the backs of workers everywhere?

The final decision on the viability or otherwise of class collaboration rests with the working class—if not as a conscious social generalisation,

the people who produce this paper are undoubtedly one of the most super-exploited sections of the working-class. They spend long hours writing, laying-out, and selling the bloody thing, and don't even get paid a penny for it!

We don't mind that so much, after all we are all committed. The point is that we are still running at a loss every issue. The cost of typesetting and printing remains very high.

In the long-term we hope to get round our problems by growing as an organisation and by selling more copies of the paper more frequently. In the short-term you can help. Also, you could write for us, sending us your news, views and reports.

The comrades letter is very welcome, as it raises a number of important questions about the paper. Essentially, what kind of paper are we trying to produce and for what kind of readership? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions have to come in two parts, because there is such a difference between what we

are doing at this number, and what we would like to be doing. At the moment we are producing the paper only every two months. This means that we feel we cannot have too many agitational articles or too much coverage of struggles, for when we do the paper dates very quickly, and we can't sell all the copies we print. Also we are a small organisation and we need to create a current of opinion around us. The *Libertarian* in Britain has been irrelevant recently partly at least because of its refusal to face up to the need to justify its activity at a theoretical level. At this time an emphasis on theory is valid.

Of course in the future we hope to come out more often. Then we will cover struggles and come out frequently enough never to be irrelevant.

In terms of our readership I think one can see what we are doing at the moment is putting together a kind of readership which is a fairly limited readership, mainly those already committed to revolutionary politics. It is true that

work has been the lack of national co-ordination between the local anti-racist committees. Recently, however, a national group has emerged, called the Anti-Nazi League. This falls into the danger I have mentioned. Although many people who helped with its creation would agree with what I said earlier, they cannot see this danger.

The problem is that anti-Nazi propaganda does not raise the political question of working class solidarity with ethnic minorities against capitalist interests. All it can do, and in fact does, is ally the working class elements with elements of the ruling class. Class politics is thrown out of the window.

The only thing that differentiates the socialists inside the ANL from the rest is their militancy. There is a mistaken belief amongst some socialists that you can physically destroy fascism. Some papers

your fraternalism, John Barlowe.

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## International



The most important political developments in 1978 are taking place in Africa. With the rapid intensification of armed struggle in Zimbabwe and South Africa, and the possibility of majority rule in Zimbabwe before the year ends, the Week of Action against apartheid and other moves to build workers action against the white dictatorships in Africa have a special significance.

LIBERTARIAN COMMUNIST surveys the development of apartheid in South Africa.

PRODUCTION in South Africa today has many features which characterise it as capitalist. Companies, which are often part of giant Western capitalist enterprises, are closely linked with them, employ waged labour and judge their success by the rate of return they make on their investments.

Work and the human soul are under threat to capital.

Capitalist development in the area, however, has always been given a particular character by its links with colonial domination. Whilst not every white is a member of the capitalist ruling class, no blacks whatever their economic status, are the social equal of whites, or ever exercise authority over them.

In recent years there has been the development of a number of black petty capitalists and administrative staff in some sectors, but the operations of these individuals merely relate to particular black hierarchies, which do not include whites and which are subsidiary to the white dominated commanding heights of the political economy.

The appearance of such individuals does not moreover alter the assessment that the impact of colonial capitalism in South Africa has been predominantly felt by the African population in terms of its turning them into a source of labour bound by debilitating restrictions unknown to the developed proletariat of the metropolitan countries of the West, or to the white working class of South Africa itself.

The beginnings of this latter development lie firmly in the act of European settlement itself and its devastation of the existing African social formations through the means of expansion and military conflict.

Although the initial colonial authorities, the Dutch East India Company, and later the British government which took it over in 1795, showed signs of attempting to restrain the expansion which they thought would cost more administrative trouble than it was worth, the colonial farmers gave the colony a forward momentum.

The very existence of many of these farmers was based on expropriating the native population's land. The Xhosa replied with resistance. A series of wars between the colonists and the Africans resulted, in which the military technology and organisation of the Europeans generally proved superior.

After the war of 1834-5 the British administration refused to make a formal expropriation of territory and a number of farmers of Dutch descent struck out on their own to the NorthWest to set themselves up independently of the authorities. This was the beginning of the large-scale takeovers of land in what were to become the Boer republics, and in Natal, which the British occupied in 1871 as a consequence of the discovery of diamonds there!

Enthusiasts of the supposed tradition of British liberalism in South Africa point out that in this period of invasion there were

differences between the approaches of the British administration and the Boers. The Boers from the start did not allow any African claims to land to be valued above their own. The British on the other hand did legislate for African titles. In reality, however, this difference was mainly formal. Few Africans were in a position to take up a British title, let alone understand the need for it, let alone secure it from a partisan British officialdom.

All over South Africa the result of European settlement was to push the Africans off the land they needed to sustain their established patterns of production. Before the invasion they had made locustery and sweeping use of the land, employing techniques of wide grazing and shifting cultivation. Now they were hemmed in on poor ground which they didn't have the techniques to use to its full purpose, scant as it was. Military loss of land and cattle established a continuing cycle of impoverishment of the African population.

The colonists did not immediately connect the impoverishment of the Africans with a strategy for forcing them into waged employment. Until 1807 and the beginnings of restrictions on the slave trade, those colonists who wanted to use non-European labour bought slaves, the majority of whom seem to have come from outside South Africa. After emancipation the descendants of the slaves formed the basis of a labour pool.

It was mainly the development of export orientated wool farming in the first half of the nineteenth century which opened the eyes of the colonists to the possibility of the regular employment of African labour. By the 1870s this was being reflected in official policy. In the build up to the war with the Zulu Kingdom in 1879, for instance, the prospect was expressed by Governor Chipton that Zulu warriors would "be changed to labourers working

## World support

THE International Confederation of Free Trade Unions called for a week of action from March 13-21 against apartheid in South Africa. British opponents of apartheid have attempted to make our contribution to this a week of blacking of all trade and communications with South Africa.

An emergency action Anti-Apartheid Movement conference on 14th Feb showed that the strength of this contribution was still very much in doubt. Delegates to the conference heard Laurence Daly pledge the full support of the NUM. There was also a letter from that influential man, Jack Jones, Companion of Honour, wishing the campaign success. Jack Dromey revealed that the South East region of the TUC was urging all its Trades Council to take up the issue and Peter Nicholas threw the weight of the Leyland Trades Union Committee into the fray.

What such pronouncements will lead to in practice remains to be seen—there is a world of difference between supporting a policy and fighting for it. Workers who have seen what TUC support has meant at Grunwicks, or what TUC opposition to the 10% rule meant for the Fire Brigades Union, will need more than a few positive statements from a handful of union leaders at a small gathering in London before they take action.

Indeed, as a delegate from Preston Trades Council pointed out, blacking is a big thing to ask for, especially if you are asking for support from someone

whose job is based on trade with South Africa. Those Trade Union bodies and leaders who have supported the week of action are faced with the responsibility of becoming active campaigners against apartheid, seeking to argue the case throughout the whole working class. They should try to unify the trade union movement on the issue, and guarantee solidarity action with any workers who are victimised for blacking South African trade.

The highlight of the campaign so far has been the support of the Rover Solihull Shop Stewards' Committee. They have produced an excellent broadsheet on Leylands, Rovers and apartheid for their membership and for other trades unions as part of a real attempt to produce actual blacking action.

Such developments are to be welcomed, as they assist the development in the trade union movement of active solidarity with the African struggle. Our ultimate objective here is the permanent national blacking of all trade with South Africa until the African people have won the right to self-determination, though this strategy does not cover the problem of firms investing in South Africa but having no productive links with the country.

Where workers are not in a position to implement blacking a secondary line of action is solidarity action to secure the recognition of independent trade unions in British related firms.

for wages".

It was in this period that taxes were introduced to force Africans to work for money. Cecil Rhodes delivered a 'classic' to the Cape Legislative Assembly on the employment of Africans. "You will", he enthused, "remove them from that life of sloth and laziness, you will teach them the dignity of labour and make them contribute to the prosperity of the state and make them give some return to us for our wise and good government."

The turn to the use of Africans as labourers was given a particularly important impulse and direction by the development of the South African mining industry. It was this which first led to the introduction of metropolitan capital into the country in a big way.

## Diamonds

Diamonds were the first mineral resource to be exploited, in the 1880s. Diamond mining methods did not require large capital injections from the metropolitan stock exchanges. Although Rhodes did resort to a London syndicate for funds in his takeover of the Kimberley mines, the diamond magnates who emerged in general owed their prominence to enterprise in the field and the exploitation of market outlets rather than to "foreign" backing.

Diamond mining contribution to the sucking in of metropolitan capital was that it created an on the spot entrepreneurial structure and links with the European markets which gave the discovery of the Witwatersrand gold reefs in the 1880s immediate commercial viability. It was from the offices of the diamond merchants in Hatton Garden and Holborn Viaduct that the first gold shares were sold to raise the money needed by the more capital intensive gold industry. A.K. Cairncross in his 'Home and Foreign Investment' (1953) cites figures showing that Britain had £34 million invested in South Africa in 1884 and that this had risen to £20 bn. by 1911. Much of this money went to the gold fields.

The mining brought new sophistication to the colonialists employment of Africans. In 1889 the mine owners combined in a "Chamber of Mines", which despite internal difficulties made moves to establish a common maximum wage for Africans. In 1898 this body established a "Native Labour Supply Association" in order to co-ordinate recruitment. At the same time the mines saw the development for the first time of a significant white waged labour force, generally classed as skilled, and on much higher wages.

Exploitation of gold brought with it further upheaval in the political map of South Africa. Conflict between the Boer farmers and the gold interest broke out into the "Boer War" and its attempted resolution in the 1910 Act of Union.

The saving common interest of the camps represented in these struggles, and of the white working class, was the realisation of their common and increasing benefit from subjugation of the Africans. From the unification till after the great white miners strike of 1922 (in which the red flag was raised and workers militias were formed in defence of white differential) we can see the consolidation of this white supremacism and its progressive legal codification by a legal apparatus which remained, of course, excluded white.

The 'Mines and Works Act' of 1911 denied skilled jobs in the mines to Africans. The 'Native Labour Regulations Act' of the same year imposed stringent legal controls which made breaches of work discipline criminal. The 1913 'Land Act' froze the proportion of land available for use by African and made it illegal for an African to buy or rent land from a white. 1924 saw the first 'Industrial Conciliation Act' which gave whites full labour rights, but not Africans.

Development up to this point had, as it were, laid the basis for contemporary apartheid. The rural self-sufficiency and organisation of the Africans had been destroyed and they had been made into a large low-paid waged labour force. Contemporary apartheid, however, is more than just a forward projection from the situation as it was 50 years ago. It



# International

represents a response to two developments the breakdown of internal migrant labour and the growth of capitalist industry outside the mining sector.

Complementary to the development of the mining industry in particular was the causal and migratory nature of much of the African workforce. The idea that the Africans should be allowed to enter "white" territory only if they were working there was an old one, stretching back to the issuing of frontier passes in the early nineteenth century Cape colony. The "model" African worker got a permit and

like the proletariat elsewhere, has a tremendous capacity to challenge its exploitation. The proletariat possesses common needs, a common settlement, the ability to communicate even so the old tribal barriers have been broken down, and above all a new capacity for organisation. It is in order to meet this challenge that modern apartheid has developed in the way it has.

The three main aspects of apartheid's use of this challenge are its labour legislation, its "Bantustan" policy, and the preservation of its colonialist political

to Africans and whites. Section 17 of the Industrial Conciliation Act allows for the banning of racial groups from jobs. Government Notice no. 1856 of Oct 26th 1957, for instance, reserved for whites the jobs of machinists, supervisors, cutters and work hands in the clothing industry.

It must be added, though, that much of job reservation in South African industry has come about as a result of agreements between employers and the white trades unions. Associated with this is the practice of re-grading jobs so that Africans doing them get less than whites,

"Workers Unity" again draws out the implications: "Workers will be forcibly separated on a 'tribal' basis, not only in the Bantustans, but also in the industrial areas there—i.e., segregation of living quarters already applies to the barracks and compounds for migrant workers . . . It will probably also find in time to come that the jobs in each factory will be allocated to workers from one particular Bantustan only. When workers in a factory prove "troublesome," the government will threaten to allocate jobs in the factory to another Bantustan. Rivalry between different groups of African workers will thus be encouraged."

As the Africans are forced to become citizens of Bantustans, the present meagre rights of settlement will be abolished. The pass laws will be abolished and laws governing "aliens" introduced. Already African political and industrial militants have been deported to the Bantustans.

The executive machinery of apartheid is, of course, white political monopoly and brutal police repression. Colonial capitalism has throughout its history relied upon armed force as the ultimate agency of its development. The response of the authorities to the protests initiated by the students of Soweto 2 years ago and the vast number of black political prisoners are the most prominent modern examples of this.

In the last three years trade unionists have died in detention. November 1976 saw the banning of 24 leading trade unionists and members of advisory organisations, black and white. The terms of such banning orders, which last in most cases for 5 years, prohibit publication of the banned person's views, visits by more than one person, freedom of movement, etc. In short a cheap alternative to imprisonment.

In conclusion it is worth dwelling a moment on the conditions of the Africans, created by all the above. Last ditch apologists for apartheid claim that if nothing else the Africans in South Africa are better off than the Africans in the rest of Africa. Of course, even if this were the case it would hardly be relevant to the essential question of the *division* of social resources and authority.

Much of the evidence in fact contradicts even such a ridiculous justification for the near slavery of the African population amongst vast riches. In terms of per capita income by dollar comparison, First, Steele and Gurney, in "The South African Connection" (1963), provide figures indicating higher incomes, in 1968, in several other African states. According to Rogers in his book "Divide and Rule" the average income in the four largest Bantustans in 1974 was lower than in most places in the continent except for those like the drought-stricken Sahel region, reduced to universally recognised distress.

It is true that per capita incomes figures are a poor way of gauging living standards, but considerations of the things they lack or reflect even more badly on South Africa. You can't compare the incomes of wholly urbanised with those who still have the use of some agricultural land, let alone the per capita incomes of those in a highly industrialised state like South Africa and those in other countries who are, perhaps, almost entirely agriculturally self-sufficient. The low incomes in the Bantustans might not be a factor for ploughing. The African workers are forced to wait in the Bantustans, like the oxen of the boss, until they are chosen for work in the cities. The difference is that the farmers generally look after their cattle well. The Bantustans are intended to physically divide up the African workers, to facilitate greater control over them in the existing industrial areas, and to create new low-wage industrial sites.

A government Department of Information pamphlet of 1968, "Taking Factories to the People", if read the right way, indicates rising class thinking with some clarity. Talking about the process of modern industrialisation, the author comments: "It divorced the Bantu worker from his own country and his own society . . . and tended to turn him from a proud member of a Bantu nation into a cypher in an urban proletariat."

I.G.



Soweto schoolkids, August 1976. The riots were followed by a harsh repression.

Photo: Macmillan/Sunday Observer Press.

then worked for a given period and then cleared off again.

As with the actual expropriation of land, it would require monumental scholarship to uncover precisely the breakdown of this "yeasty" based migrancy into settlement either on "white" rural territory or into urban areas. (Increasing urbanisation of Africans is, however, one fact clearly reflected by government census statistics. Whereas in 1911 572,000 Africans (12.7% of the African population) were recorded as town dwellers, by 1938 the number had risen to 1,246,000 (18.8%) and by 1951 to 2,290,000 (26.8%).

The growth of capitalist industry outside of the mining sector was the single most important factor behind this progressive urbanisation. South African industry diversified not because of the intervention of metropolitan capital or the mining interests linked with it, though these did come in with a bang later. Apart from a few metropolitan interests such as ICI, Dunlop, Siemens, Ford, General Motors and Lever, the first new industrialists came from within South Africa itself but not from the mining magnates. Africanisation then began to organise the use of savings for commerce and industry. When in power the Nationalist Party pioneered the use of state money to set up new industry, like the Iron and Steel Corporation in 1922, and to assist new native entrepreneurs.

## The Boom

These efforts prepared the ground for a post-war boom at the instigation of the metropolitan capitalist corporations. It has been estimated that between 1946 and 1955 £700 million was invested in South Africa from abroad, £200 million of this coming from Britain. Between 1956, when official figures first became available, and 1969, a further £1,000 million was invested. The pattern continues today, with Britain still leading the world.

The African proletariat created by this second great colonial capitalist expansion,

monopoly. Apartheid's labour legislation is based upon distinctions between white (and coloured) workers and blacks, and has been elaborated by successive Industrial Conciliation Acts. These have established norms of labour organisation and representation for all employees.

The catch is that each act attempted to find a progressively more exact formula for excluding Africans from the category of "employees". In the 1956 version the legislators described an employee as any person other than a "Native", and a "Native" as any person belonging to, or generally accepted as, a member of any original race or tribe of Africa.

African workers are still subject to the work discipline enforced by criminal penalties of the 1856 Cape "Masters and Servants" Act and the 1911 "Native Labour Regulation" Act. According to the 1953 "Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes)" Act the interests of African workers are supposed to be represented to their employers by white government officials. Only since 1971 has it been technically possible for them to hold a legal strike, but this right is so heavily circumscribed that it is practically meaningless. The only legal African workers strike to have taken place to date was smashed by the police and the aid of their employers by white government officials. Only since 1971 has it been technically possible for them to hold a legal strike, but this right is so heavily circumscribed that it is practically meaningless.

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The African proletariat created by this second great colonial capitalist expansion,

# Libertarian Communist

## Anti-racist fight must be won!

Since last summer race has never been far from the news. Recently the Tory and Labour parties have been hitting the headlines on the issue.

The Tories have done their best to pander to the gut prejudices that do undoubtedly exist in this country. They hint at pass laws, they hint at an end to all immigration on the scale that it has been known in the past.

For the time being they can't come out too strongly because there is still a 'liberal' wing to the Tory party that finds such overt racialism sticks in its throat. Certainly, though, Maggie Thatcher has done enough to gain quite a few votes from the National Front at the next election.

That's what it's all about really, the next election. It looks from here that an election in the Autumn is now a very strong possibility.

Labour's response to this has been to keep the traditional support of the immigrant communities but they know that there are a lot of cheap votes to be won by playing the racist card. They've allowed the Tories to draw them into playing the numbers game.

What this involves is accepting the racist assumption that immigrants and by that they mean black

immigrants, are in themselves a bad thing.

Maggie says that there are 'far too many coming in' and that we are being 'swamped'. Marilyn Rees and other Labour ministers say that there are fewer and fewer coloured immigrants coming in (since our racist immigration controls work so well anyway) and that there are more people leaving the country every year than are coming in.

The trouble with these ideas is that the Labour party is in fact conceding that there is something wrong with blacks, their culture and their needs. They are conceding that blacks are a 'problem'.

Fortunately, the struggle on the ground, at the grass roots, must be said to be going in favour of the anti-racists. There are now thriving anti-racist and anti-fascist committees all over the country. In London, the area I know best, there have been some considerable gains.

Amongst other things there has been the successful anti-racist demonstration through the British Movement's stamping ground of Hoxton, last Autumn. By the time you read this the East End anti-racist Carnival will have taken place, and they look set to be a great success.

The National Front have been prevented from establishing a presence on the streets in Croydon,



A FIFTY-ONE YEAR OLD, decidedly put out by the jargon of local kids, arrives at Loughridge School in Croydon for a National Front demo meeting. Many people had spent the morning loitering in the constituency, warning residents of the potential threat from the NF, and attempting to give support and encouragement to black people in the area. (Photo Andrew Wigd) (Report).

and they don't seem to have had much success elsewhere in establishing a regular paper sale recently.

Nationally, the rise of the Anti-Nazi League has been important. The Socialist Workers Party, and with the endorsement of several MPs and many prominent sports and media personalities, has undoubtedly reached and organised wide layers of people on the basis of their opposition to the National Front and other Nazi organisations.

Unfortunately, the Anti-Nazi League has no clear political alternative to put forward. There's nothing particularly wrong with its approach, it just doesn't 'go far' enough. However, many socialists will be getting involved in the Anti-Nazi League, and are sure to raise more 'political' demands, against immigration controls, for a socialist alternative to the ideas put forward by the racists.

Indeed, the elections that are on the horizon may have caused the capitalist press and the bourgeois parties to reveal their racist opinions, but they may turn out to be occasions on which the anti-racists make their views known as well.

The Socialist Unity campaign,

strength is that its told by people who took part in the work-in themselves. The pamphlet points out that a work-in is only a defensive tactic in the long term struggle inside the health service.

This tactic should be borne in mind by all public sector workers. Make sure YOUR union branch workplace is prepared for it. You could not do better than get hold of this pamphlet. At 10p (post paid) its worth putting in a bulk order.

Also, there is a valuable outline of planning procedures and how to use them to get information and

Review

list of useful address.

This is a very well produced pamphlet and I found it really easy to follow. But what really gives it its

public sector.

A pamphlet this has been needed for a long time. Everybody who needs to know about work-in is covered. From answering peoples early uncertainties and getting started to running the occupation and getting support. Of particular value are the sections on keeping the hospital operating, involving all the staff and warnings of managements dirty tricks.

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## We're winning while we're fighting!

"We're winning while we're fighting." That is how one hospital worker in "Keeping hospitals open" sums up the fight to save the health service. "Keeping hospitals open" has been written by staff from Plaisford, Hounslow and EGA hospitals. They aim to pass on their experience of working-in. Although it is directed at hospital workers, the principles apply to other areas in the

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# Libertarian Communist

Special Supplement

10p



## Socialism and Democracy



Czechoslovakia 1968. Fifty years before, the Soviets and Factory Councils were a profoundly democratic aspect of the Russian Revolution, where for the first time the Russian peasants and workers took their future into their own hands. This soon degenerated: the mass organs were either brought under Bolshevik control or destroyed, and within the Party democracy was declared "a luxury" and free debate banned. In Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia twelve years later, the workers had their backs to the wall and Soviet "democracy" was imposed at the end of a tank barrel.

Photo Camera Press

We all associate the idea of democracy with that of freedom. We all, or most of us, accept that freedom should not be absolute for any individual, principally insofar as the actions of one person or group of persons may have a disadvantageous effect upon the circumstances of others. Seen in its most handsome profile, a democratic society is one attempting to ensure that there are guidelines for social involvement which embody guarantees of individual right neither encroached on by others nor encroaching upon them. It attempts to define a mean and an equilibrium amongst individuals as regards their intercourse with others and with the community as a whole.

It is customary to regard our own country as being an example of a democratic society. But how well does it really measure up to criteria such as those suggested above? The majority of people probably think that it does so reasonably well. They would as like as not give the following reasons. Firstly that politically the unity of the state is based upon the equality of all citizens. We enjoy universal suffrage, free and regular elections to parliament, and more or less effective rights of free speech, association, and opposition. Secondly, there is equality before the law. And thirdly, economic life is based upon free contracts, made between individuals.

The communist assessment is rather different. It judges according to more comprehensive and demanding standards. We turn first towards consideration of our economic life, it is here that we find the most deep-rooted "un-democratic" aspects of contemporary reality.

"Freedom of contract" really doesn't mean very much. It is unreasonable to speak of economic freedoms in isolation from relations of property and production. In a society divided into the property owners and the propertyless, and where the social norms are those of property and money, the crucial difference from a bargaining point of view is that those without property cannot lay claim to an independent basis for existence where property assumes the form of capital. They can exist only as proletarian workers; production they have purchased, and each aims to end up with an output of commodities worth more than the sum of his original outlay. While the workers through the contract maintain their existence, they do not in general increase their wealth to the extent that they become property owners themselves.

The capitalists and the workers are thus very unequal partners in their "free contracts" of exchange, in terms of their

disposition over the creative forces of the worker. The capitalists put this creative force to work on the other components of production they have purchased, and each aims to end up with an output of commodities worth more than the sum of his original outlay. While the workers through the contract maintain their existence, they do not in general increase their wealth to the extent that they become property owners themselves.

The capitalists and the workers are thus very unequal partners in their "free contracts" of exchange, in terms of their

relative bargaining strengths and of their material remuneration. But the "undemocratic" nature of capitalism does not end with this.

## Ideal

The ideal of democracy imagines deliberation amongst equals as the best basis for human affairs. Every individual partakes equally in the determination of the common good. The economic right of capitalism, on the other hand, embraces no such mechanism of mutual assessment. Along

# Socialism and Democracy

with their labour capacity, the workers sell their potential for conscious collective control over their labour. On the one hand, they are bound over to the demands of the market system of the reproduction of capital, and become at worst mere factors in the domination of its accountancy: here are the roots of unemployment, speed-up, fluctuating real wages, etc, too numerous, intertwined, and in some respects obscure, to go into here. On the other hand, work, though vastly more materially productive and remunerative than in previous periods, is still not a property of the workers as a complete expression of their humanity. They lack the exercise of sober judgement over their own activity. Some live in bleak and depressing conditions at the same time as immense amounts of initiative, energy and materials are poured into the amassing of a seemingly endless clutter of comparatively superfluous novelties: furniture, luxuries, ornaments and prestige objects to satisfy not so much the more expansive gestures of the soul as errata needed specially made in order to be sold by the advertising wizards.

## Deprivation

Is it possible that anyone would actually defend such a balance of priorities if the problems of distribution were put to them as something which would be acted upon? Deprivation exists alongside extremes of self-indulgence, insecurity, overwork and utility exist alongside the liberating might of modern industry, precisely because the balance in our lives between work, leisure, resources and need does not stand in any direct relationship to us but is rather determined through the alien social configuration of the exchange market and the accumulating, commodity producing drive of capital.

At this stage, non-socialists who find the above convincing enough may at the same time feel a little cheated. "It's all very well," they could say, "comparing the capitalist economy with an abstract ideal of democracy and finding it wanting: in real life people, that is those living in the advanced capitalist countries at least, concentrate on the progress which has been made, and the social and political achievements associated with capitalism."

Such observations are valid insofar as it is indeed true that capitalism has in many walks of life brought tremendous benefits which no one in their right mind would want to throw away, and insofar as it is experientially judged not according to abstract ideals but through the act of living





Occupation at Master Ferguson. Workers have almost no democratic rights over their everyday work – but workplace occupations pose collective power during workers struggles.

itself. The point remains, however, that this living is not yet without its examples of dislocation and suffering, which whilst they occur we shall be impelled to seek to eradicate. And also, of course, that it quite legitimately sets expanding ideal objectives for itself. Some people develop out of a multitude of frictions between themselves and their world an acute comprehension in general terms of the limitations of their being as part of capitalism. Others proceed contented until one of its iron necessities should unexpectedly whip out at them and they find no channel for "reasonable" consideration of their cause nor redress of their grievance.

Our estimation of the path of capitalist development, moreover, leads us to suspect it of bearing a structural incapacity when it comes to reproducing itself smoothly according even to its own priorities. Needs and aspirations repeatedly find a barrier, and working class powerlessness is repeatedly exposed, in the great crises which can befal the capitalist civilisations. Superficially as providential as visitations of pestilence or

embracing class analysis and context. Proletarian workers, for instance, may understand the many ways in which their lives are commonly affected by their being members of the capitalist working class. They may rate the limits of their common expectations within capitalism, and if these are too narrow balance the happy prospects of change in the mode of production against the dangers and hazards therein.

## Democracy

Our pursuit of the communist attitude to democracy must ultimately involve us in dwelling upon how such a freedom for the working class actually expresses itself. Before moving on to this however, we shall attempt to go a little more into the circumstances in which they must take place. We have given an interpretation of capitalist economics, indicating some of the boundaries which its very structure gives to self-determination for the working class. To complete the picture we must next turn to examine some aspects of those

Photo John Sturrock (Report)

then have in general been dominated by individuals associated with the social power of capital. The necessities of the capitalist mode of production, both generally and in its particular phases, give rise to social generalisations in the form of policies for the state. Those social groups which enjoy a special position and special benefits relating to the mode of production also have a special interest in understanding and operating these policies. The very economic privileges they seek to protect give them a head start in the political sphere also.

Reciprocal sequent of background, advantaged education, nepotism, influence and freedom from the wage bond have ensured that in terms of personnel it has remained a basic, statistically verifiable fact of life in all the advanced capitalist democracies that the men and women in them have been and are governed, administered, represented, judged and commanded in war cadres drawn, for the most part if not exclusively, from those layers already associated with the definition and implementation of the needs of capital and with the more lavish harvesting of its material benefits.

Such a repeated pattern of high social origin in state officials is testimony of how the combination of disadvantage in the wider life of society with formal political equalities results in the socially advantaged gaining a distinct advantage in the political sphere. This has had important consequences for the range of social options presented within the arena of mainstream political debate and for the stability of class divisions in terms of their expression through government. Even so, this factor is not an absolute explanation of the history of the advanced capitalist democracies, nor an absolute indicator of their limitations.

## Origins

The point can be made that individuals of working class social origin have filled important functions in these states, and that they have been advanced by working class organisation and by working class participation in the parliamentary process. J.R. Clynes, for instance, wrote in his memoirs of the social origins of some of the members of the first Labour government that he could not help marveling at the strange turn of Fortunes Wheel, which had brought MacDonald the strolling clerk, Thomas the engine driver, Henderson the foundry labourer, and Clynes, the mill-hand, to the pinnacle besides the man whose forebears had been kings for so many generations.

Compared with the movement into public life of those of the ruling class, the success of these men had demanded incomparably more endeavour and self-sacrifice, not only by themselves but by many thousands of their supporters and other builders of a working class political culture, folk who had repeatedly and wearily to drag themselves into the arduous tasks of study and organisation in the brief hours given them for recuperation from their daily labours.

But the point for the moment is that they made it. What's more their government, in its concerns, indeed bore marks of their backgrounds. It fostered social advance in the area of municipal housing and educational scholarships, legislated moderate improvements in unemployment and pension benefits, and instituted a few public works to assist the unemployed.

Does the emergence of a government such as this indicate that the advanced capitalist state may plausibly serve the working class in any aspiration to which it might be inclined?

Signal as the achievement of the early Labour Party undoubtedly was, it never presented itself as the spearhead of an anti-capitalist working-class movement. It did nothing whilst in office to challenge the root causes of either unemployment or deprivation, the two main problems it sought to redress.

Indeed, all governments are structurally divorced from the productive operation of capitalism, and this has meant that reformist governments like any others have responded to the needs shown by capital rather than those shown by society, as the former are unexplained 'gifts' in society.

The working class has been able to secure structural participation in advanced capitalist democratic governments only in periods when there has been a degree of working-class benefit from capital and on conditions of 'moderation' (i.e. class collaboration) in working class political demands.

In our opinion this experience does not provide sufficient basis for us to presume that representative institutions in capitalism would serve as an adequate arena for working class anti-capitalist tendencies. In our opinion there are two further reasons for dismissing this possibility.

The first of these is that there is reason to believe that the ruling class will not extend its own adherence to such institutions to the extent of them being recognised as bearing a mandate for deep social reorientation. Business remains possessed, like the working class, of its own pattern of self-organisation outside of the existing formal political structures of the state. Even where it possesses no alternative institutions for decision making an aggregate of discrete actions relating to the business world can emerge as a distinct social line for capital, in the same way as the working class can build an aggregate line piecemeal. The rise of fascism in both Germany and Italy, for instance, took place during periods of crisis for capital particularly acute for these countries, which had suffered in the Imperialist redifinitions after the First World War. Despite its use of anti-capitalist rhetoric and subsequent attacks on some capitalists as individuals, the most important policies of fascism – destruction of labour organisation and military and aggressive nationalist expansion – proved an attractive option to many capitalists. It would have found success more difficult without the finance forwarded by certain sectors of the bourgeoisie; and it was also assisted by the leniency which police and judiciary were wont to show towards its use of violence and intimidation against the labour movement and the Jews. On another instance the great Spanish revolution of 1936 was itself precipitated by a right wing military coup against a democratically elected government with radical tendencies. More recently the government of Salvador Allende in Chile, overthrown by a CIA-backed military coup in 1973, was widely regarded as a test case for the parliamentary transition to socialism.

Our second consideration, which is indeed perhaps more fundamental, seeks a further elaboration of our attitude through reference to what we can understand about the needs of the working class in terms of a socialist alternative.

When we talk about a particular historic event (the 1925 General Strike, for instance), we can employ a degree of analysis which allows us to sum up the behaviour of the working class in terms of its revealing some general social propensity. This panoramic device remains our main tool for understanding the broadest movements and potentialities of working class (and hence social) development.

Even the most distinct and critical of these movements is, in terms of its actual unfolding, a process not devoid of contradiction and ambiguities. They tend to proceed in the form of surges of opinion and attitude. Our powers of abstraction, nevertheless, draw out from them recurrent patterns and characteristics. Thus we can note for instance, repeated circumstances



Workers at the IMRO printing works in Normandy occupied their factory for nine months against closure until they were evicted by French riot police. They rejected the solution of turning the factory into a workers cooperative, seeing this as a solution that served the needs of capital. Instead they posed and managed struggle against the restructuring of the French printing industry and the Barre Austerly Plan, of which the redundancies were a part.

drought, these great convulsions bear witness in their means of resolution to the subordinate position of the working class, and in the very "spontaneity" of their occurrence to our lack of control over our own productivity.

## Limits

Individuals assess their needs and the prospects of their satisfaction according to the pattern of growth and change and achievement of capitalism itself. It is, however, further possible for them to extrapolate from these individual equations of need formation and satisfaction an

where dislocation between the working class and the particular extant capital-established social direction has been so grievous that the former has, in rejecting the latter, thrown up spontaneously multiple centres of resistance based on the creation of, or emphasis of, allegiance to, totally independent local working class organs. These bodies – workers councils, soviets, councils of action – have represented a need felt by the workers to achieve a new level of participation in the making of decisions affecting them; they have been the first awkward expressions of an independent workers power.

## Councils

Here is what the Italian communist Gramsci wrote about such movements in an article, "The Turin Workers Councils". (He was thinking in particular of factory based organisations, but his observations do have a wider application.) "Insofar as it builds this representative apparatus, the working class effectively completes the expropriation of the primary machine, of the most important instrument of production, the working class itself. It thereby rediscovers itself, acquiring consciousness of its organic unity and counterposing itself as a whole to capitalism. The working class thus asserts that industrial power and its source ought to return to the factory. It presents the factory in a new light, from the workers point of view as a form in which the working class constitutes itself into a specific organic body, as the cell of the new state, the workers' state – and as the basis of a new representative system, a system of councils.

Really, this indicates more what can be read into such situations rather than what is necessarily automatically there in every case. But there are tremendous implications. The workers turn away from the established foil of social unity and express confidence only in those of their own organisations through which they feel they can directly express their needs and interests. Sometimes this action has appeared as a dead end, with no ready way forward being apparent. The need for the expropriation to which Gramsci referred, however, is always directly or indirectly manifest – the need to become owners of ourselves is felt most generally as the need to somehow pull the world as an outside social reality into a subjection such as we strive for over the world as a material reality, to make our society, or our own property, to bring it under a control which we acknowledge and in which we can participate. Whenever the working class turns to sole dependence upon its own self-organisation, we see the possibility of the complete overturn of alienation and of the foundation of the mass self-determination of labour.

What does democracy mean under these circumstances? On the one hand it begins to have potency with regards to the entire organisation of production. On the other it retains its formal element of equality of deliberation on the new basis of equality of social position posited within the institutions of workers' power. Experience shows that the latter is essential to the former. Whereas in capitalist societies the lack of democracy in the economic sphere perverts the impact of the structures of political democracy in existing alongside them, in the socialist societies lack of democracy in the economic sphere arises precisely because and as part of the demise of the requisite sort of political democracy.

Establishment of an independent organisation of workers power is essential to the transition to socialism. It provides simultaneously the necessary social-structural base and a much firmer network for the possibly needed task of self-defence. Unfortunately, however, it is these two strong reasons why the working class in capitalism so often moves in terms of turbulent inarticulacy when it comes to the reconciliation of its particular objectives with broader social generalisations. These troubled currents are nevertheless the very life-blood of our general social development, and

## Needs

It is here that we must return to the very process of social assessment of need formation and satisfaction within the working class. Whenever working class aspirations and capitalist reality grate against itself like gears out of mesh, it is on one level possible to draw out of the situation two broad alternatives for the workers involved, on the one hand acquiescence in capital and consequent restriction of expectations to guidelines consistent with it – on the other, rejection of capital, and organisation to achieve the restructuring of society. But such alternatives rarely present themselves directly in the consciousness of the workers involved. Partly, this is because the history of capitalism contains many references to "entrenchment" in the material conditions of the metropolitan workers and to their winning of specific objectives, so that there appears little basis for regarding any conflict as being absolutely critical to the stability of the social whole. Even in a period of crisis the gains of isolated sectors of the working class may indeed be compensated for through various rectifying mechanisms (price control, value transfer, etc.). There are, however, more fundamental causes.

Firstly, the very fact that capitalism appears as the domination of society by alien forces rather than as mutual stimulation of work is bound up with the stultification of our groping for an authentic voice of self-expression amidst all the powerlessness, bonds, confusions and contradictions of capitalist society – bureaucracy, mirror-lame empire.

economic life amongst separate commodity producers and the consequent placing of emphasis upon local struggles and conditions.

Secondly, again referring to alienation, the weight of experience tends to bestow an empirical, verifiable, absolute reality to existing social relations and to thus create conditions which suspend workers in struggle between acceptance and rejection of them.

And finally, the cultural and educational conditions of working class existence ill prepare working class individuals to imagine general social locations in terms of analytical comparison – with dissatisfaction more often than not consequently yielding strictly individual or specific circumstances. These are the strong reasons why the working class in capitalism so often moves in terms of turbulent inarticulacy when it comes to the reconciliation of its particular objectives with broader social generalisations. These troubled currents are nevertheless the very life-blood of our general social development,

can meet our objectives, but feel that in a socialist society they might become the central directional reference for a proper economic plan. This isn't to say that winning any one objective in any single situation would be either impossible or any less a part of socialism. The way we indicate the fact that the aggregate tendency of need formation and satisfaction in the working class is towards finding barriers in capitalism and no basis in it for equitable resolution. It that trend towards requiring socialism.

Meanwhile, we emphasise that the absence of any mechanism of equitable social distribution means that any section of workers taking up a grievance against capital is faced with the choice of either fighting directly for their cause or acquiescing in the decision of the affair by their own willingness to take such self-defining actions, and in general we respond to working class struggles from the standpoint of acknowledging their vital role in the evolution of an eloquent and independent proletarian voice.



The Lombridge toolmakers struck unofficially last year for higher differentials, and provoked criticism from the left as well as the bourgeois media. However, socialists should support ALL action on wage demands, particularly when it is triggered by the union bureaucrats, while continuing to hammer home the point that the wage increase does not have to be at the expense of other workers. Photo John Sturrock (Report)

our groping for an authentic voice of self-expression amidst all the powerlessness, bonds, confusions and contradictions of capitalist society – bureaucracy, mirror-lame empire.

## Foothold

At this juncture, a summary of the main assertions made so far may well prove useful. It has been argued firstly, that the capitalist mode of production bears some profoundly "undemocratic" characteristics. Secondly, that its consequences and class structure affect the relative accessibility of democratic political organs to the working class. Thirdly, that where the working class has nevertheless gained a foothold in these political institutions it has not been in order to fundamentally change society – there has been no attempt to use parliament to directly control all aspects of social production. Fourthly, that the independent self-organisation of capital and its ability to mobilise anticapitalist forces would probably render any such attempt to plan production through parliament impossible. And fifthly, that the nature of the development of social assessment of need formation and satisfaction in the working class is in any case such as to suggest that its prime location in capitalism lies in its inchoate level in its many struggles, and that socialism is posited as a possibility for the working class only under specific circumstances arising from these and through the associated erection of specific types of social organisation.

The above are important points of reference in the libertarian communist world view. They do indeed add up to a lack of confidence in the ability of parliamentary democracy to be a suitable matrix for socialism. We have a different understanding of what is socially and politically important as compared with those parties which believe that parliament is the sovereign residence of collective social action.

We attempt in particular to relate to the areas of dislocation between the life and aspirations of the working class and the necessities of capital, affirming that that life and those aspirations deserve to be treated differently by society. Consequently, when we formulate a policy what we attempt to achieve is a statement of what the general social and positive resolution of such dislocations could amount to – not being bound in our proposals by the specific prospects of capital. We propose objectives for the working class to aim at, rather than capitalist "solutions". We doubt if capital

By way of a conclusion we should refer more directly to the "case against us" mentioned in the introductory paragraph. The first thing we must do here is admit that socialist politics do bear very grave dangers – it would be difficult to deny that any contemporary social response which didn't. The particular danger in an anti-capitalist revolution of failing to sustain mass democratic involvement arises partly from the tempestuous aspect of the nature of working class development to which we have already referred, and partly to the specific military and economic difficulties which may initially beset those areas which first attempt the establishment of planned economies.

It is important for us to realise first, that the attractiveness of a planned economy doesn't in itself solve the immense problems of organising one, and secondly, that a planned economy bears no automatic return if not satisfied, guarantee of socialist democracy. Those who desire socialist democracy therefore have special tasks in this direction. In particular they must train themselves as well as possible in the history of revolutions, looking closely at what affects this factor of mass involvement in the social processes than at work and attempting to understand the degree to which it may be consciously striven after with success. We accept that the Left today is deficient in this area, and also in the important collateral task of elaborating and investigating economic planning models and procedures. Obviously such theoretical schemes must proceed further than their present stage, and certainly to become a much more central concern of every socialist.

## Front

Turning to certain current socialist policies which are widely thought to be undemocratic – such as the nature of our opposition to the National Front and support of rank and file militancy – well, the first point to be made is that these are really secondary to our main arguments on the issues presented above: it is possible to disagree both with them and the main argument, or merely with how they interpret the mandate of this latter. In general, they do us little harm. The case for no platform is, for instance, built up out of several of the



Socialist democracy is not passive "Free Speech" when it comes to openly fascist organisations like the National Front. They oppose democratic rights in the working class, and positive action that be taken to deny them a platform for their lies, in order to safeguard those rights and to protect the rights of the black communities against the racist violence the NF promote. Photo John Sturrock (Report)



interpretations made above plus other specific observations concerning the Front and fascism. We see that the leadership of the National Front has a history of open idolatry of Hitler and that many of the party's policies mirror those of the Nazis — not just on race but on things such as hostility to "finance capital", desire for a strong state, both home and abroad, intention to dismantle the industrial organisation of the working class, etc. We have seen that it is possible for the ruling class to remove its support from the parliamentary type state in favour of a fascist regime and that parliamentary conventions may fail a working class faced with such direct action organised on behalf of capital. We can see how the National Front has repeatedly tried to develop the strike forces and mass movement which is the first basis for such direct action (though we wouldn't claim that many of the ruling class as yet see it as operating in their interests). And thus we come to the conclusion that to make sure that the fascists don't take off into becoming a credible option for capital we must show now that we will not grant them the advantage of restricting our opposition to normal political channels, but will seek to thwart them through mass direct opposition, especially insofar as their attempt at intimidation and self-organisation around violence are concerned.

## Reject

In similar fashion, our case for supporting unofficial industrial actions upon their merits rather than upon whether or not they are made official relates primarily to our view of working class development outlined in the main



Oppressed groups — women, gays and blacks — have a particular relationship to socialist democracy, it is vital for their movements to have organisational and political autonomy — both before and after a socialist revolution, since it would be naive to assume that their demands would instantly and automatically be met.

Photo Chris Davies (Repo 1)

body of this article. But it also incorporates further arguments, which time and space prohibit going into here, about the trade unions specifically, which lead us to reject certain aspects of their organisation and practice with regards to the relationship in them between representatives of the corporate whole and the rank and file. (See, for instance, the editorial in the last edition of *LC*.)

Since our analysis of the world shows us a state of affairs in which there is no legitimate repository of egalitarian social unity, we find ourselves repeatedly trying to place ourselves in the living history of its creation — by no means a simple of self-evident project. We do try as part of this, or at least good socialists

do, to be careful always to enhance mass involvement in the erection of procedures with real meaning in terms of extended participation in the vital decisions about life: this even under conditions where such participation is forwarded only through the hectic and inefficient mechanism of struggle.

We certainly believe our mission to be a democratic one — in the sense described in this article. Perhaps better people than us have been deluded about the impact of themselves upon the world. At least we seek not to delude others about what this world is, about the options it presents, about the forces at work in it or about how we understand our own role.

I.G.

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# Libertarian Communist

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# SPAIN 1936



The Revolution which started on July 19th 1936 took place in a period of Spanish and international political and economic crisis. Spain had suffered badly in the 1931 Wall Street crash and the Depression. Its industries had developed rapidly in the 1914-1918 war, when there was no competition and the demand from both sides was high.

By 1936 unemployment was over 30% in many towns and industries, and estimates of the number unemployed in a total industrial work-force of about 3 million vary between 1.5 million and 1 million. Agriculture was also badly affected, but the main problem was a structural one, with 20,000 latifundia owners holding 70% of the land. Forms of land ownership varied but outside a belt of Catholic tenant farmers between Leon and Navarre, small holders and peasants were discontented and prepared to seize the land. Seventy per cent of the population was still living on the land, whilst the urban population was split between Madrid and Barcelona with over a million each, and a number of smaller towns. Over the five years up to 1936 the cost of living had risen by over 80%.

The international context for the coming revolution was very unfavourable. Mussolini had early on given his support to the right wing in Spain. Hitler was to see war as an opportunity to train his troops in action. By 1936 Stalin had wiped out all opposition to him in Russia. After imposing a line that characterised the socialists as social-fascists in the period after the rise of Hitler to power in 1933, he had imposed on the Communist International a rapid turn to the right, emphasising the need for communists not only with other workers' parties but also with 'radical' bourgeois parties. In 1936 in France where a socialist government supported by the Radicals took office, this policy had the effect of the Communist Party calling for a return to work to end the strike waves that had broken out there. The French CP thus blocked the way to independent class organisation which had been developing in the assemblies of the strike committees. In Spain the Communist Party was transformed. It ditched calls for revolution, halted its own youth and union organisations and merged them with the socialists - yesterday's 'fascists' no more.

Spain also had its colonial problem. There was Morocco, which like Ireland for Britain was a training ground for an otherwise sedentary army. In 1934, when Asturias had risen against the conservative CEDA party government, the Spanish army had sent troops which were used to destroy the isolated uprising.

Spain also had its colonial problem. There was Morocco, which like Ireland for Britain was a training ground for an otherwise sedentary army. In 1934, when Asturias had risen against the conservative CEDA party government, the Spanish army had sent troops which were used to destroy the isolated uprising.

## Fascism

Spain's working-class had the misfortune to face the rise of fascism alone. Whilst international movements did come to their aid, they represented little in terms of mass solidarity. Many were refugees from countries where fascism was already dominant. The volunteers from Britain, France and the USA did not represent the majority of their fellow-workers, who witnessed events only through the distorting prism of bourgeois and socialist papers. 1936 was not a year like 1918 where socialist organisations throughout the advanced capitalist world were affected by the ending of the war and by the Russian Revolution.

Rather the Spanish workers were the last to suffer undefeated from that crisis. The simultaneous crisis in France was accompanied neither by the autonomous development of class organisations such as militias and strike committees nor by the development of any of the revolutionary political tendencies into mass organisations. Instead the fragmentation of the workers' movement there increased.

Politically there was little to encourage confidence in the parties of the Spanish left. The Socialists (PSOE), the Communists (PCE) and 'left' Communists (POUM), all agreed that the coming revolution was a bourgeois one, a continuation of the 1931 revolution. They believed the revolution should limit its targets to the monarchy, the latifundia owners, the army, the ultra-reactionary Catholicism, the ultra-reactionary Castilian centralism. The popular front of these parties and the 'radicals' centred around the perpetuation of the Republic.

The record of the PSOE was unusually bad even for a reformist socialist party. Under the semi-dictatorship of Primo de Rivera the leader of the PSOE and its union the UGT (General Workers' Union) had served as a State Councillor and had supported mixed commissions of employers and trades unionists to resolve strikes. The CNT had refused this compromise which deprived workers of their autonomy and had been outlawed. This pattern had been repeated in



By 1939 the working-class had been defeated, temporarily, all over Europe. In Spain, Italy, Albania, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria fascist or militarist governments ruled through repression, preventing working-class organisation. In Russia, where market capitalism had been defeated, Stalin ruled autocratically over a state capitalist economy. In Britain and France and other European democracies the working-class movement had been directed into collaboration with the bourgeoisie to face the threat of Hitler under bourgeois control.

Millions would die fighting over the next few years in a struggle which did not achieve any changes for working people other than the partial destruction of fascism. The working-class movement which in 1910 appeared to be moving towards revolution had been unable to prevent two world wars, the degeneration of the revolution in Russia, and their co-optation into popular fronts which if they ultimately defeated Hitler in 1945 did so at the cost of preserving capitalism.

Looking back today it is difficult to imagine in this context the enthusiasm of the Spanish Revolution. History is made after all by people, and their actions are not 'inevitable'. Beyond the Stalinist Communist International, which at its Seventh Congress placed itself firmly in favour of bourgeois Popular Fronts, reflecting illusions about 'socialist' state capitalism in one country, a number of political tendencies of all shades, anarchist and Marxist and the mass of the working-class attempted to build a socialist revolution in Spain.

In the face of the defeat of the Revolution this supplement intends to concentrate on two points which were crucial to the revolutionary movement and remain so because they illustrate the problems that have to be resolved if the movement is to progress. First, the capitulation of the leaders of the CNT and the FAI (the anarcho-syndicalist National Workers' Confederation and the Iberian Anarchist Federation) who prevented the co-ordination of the revolutionary organisations and the destruction of the state; secondly, the development of industrial and economic collectives, which changed the working lives of the millions who participated in them. Before we can examine the political and economic successes and failures of the Revolution we shall try and place these problems in context.

The first years of the Second Republic (1931-1932) and in 1936. However, after the defeat of the left in the 1933 elections, as a result of an attention campaign by the CNT and the mobilisation of large numbers of peasants for the fight by the *caciques* (bosses), the socialist rank and file had begun to move left. The UGT peasant union had re-emerged as a massive force as rural bosses sacked workers in revenge for the gains won before 1933. The 1934 rising in Asturias was disastrous for this shift, but it is important to realise that the UGT leader Caballero refused to support the rising in Madrid. Thus Caballero and the other more right-wing leaders of the UGT were unreliable allies for the revolution.

The positions of the PCE before 1936

had also argued that nothing should be expected from alliances with the 'radical' bourgeoisie in Catalonia. The POUM had perhaps 30,000 members in 1936, concentrated in Catalonia, especially in the town of Lerida. The POUM joined the popular front but it criticised it too, saying that it seemed that only the workers made concessions. Whilst the POUM would support all the revolutionary initiatives instinctively throughout the civil war, it placed them in no context. It saw the CNT as the decisive voice of the workers and was prepared to wait for them to push for the revolution. It was not prepared to fight on its own, outside of its implicit relation to the CNT, which it criticised for lacking Marxist politics. Internationally the POUM was linked to the ILP, SAP, PSP, etc. in the 'London Bureau'.

Outside of these parties were other leftists, Bordighists, dissident Trotskyists, and foreign exiles like the anarchist Berneri. Such people managed only to write some good commentaries on the revolution.

## Anarchists

The anarchist movement was split into different tendencies organised largely into four groups, the CNT, the FAI, the youth (FAJ) and the women (*Mujeres Libres*). Since many commentators who should know better persist in talking of 'the anarchists' some of the basic tendencies will be explained here.

Within the CNT there were followers of all the anarchist tendencies except Pestana's Syndicalist Party. Pestana was the leader of the CNT from the murder of Segal until he was expelled in 1931. He had advocated support for the government and participation in the labour commissions. The expulsion of Pestana and his party saw their reformism increase and they eventually joined the popular front.

The minority tendency of the CNT were the *crustistas*. In the 1931 Conference they won majorities for the key proposals for national federations to link workers in each industry (as opposed to  *sindicatos unicos* which grouped workers from every factory into a town or city federation) and for a patient strategy towards the government which excluded uprising. It was this point that was the dividing line for the 'extremist' faction of the FAI who gained control after the strikes failed in Barcelona. They argued that the minority were compromising with the Generalitat, whilst the *crustistas* replied that as they were not ready for the revolution they needed some understanding with the politicians. The FAI were understandably angry when the Generalitat was to see in their faction fight the intervention of the irresponsible wing of the CNT.

In 1934 the *crustistas* did support the joint rising of the Catalan radicals, socialists and POUM. In the wave of risings that followed the *crustistas*' fears were proved justified. Whilst the Barcelona workers were already suffering from Generalist repression, which spread to the suburbs and towns around Barcelona where support for the insurrections was strongest, the rural risings were defeated one by one in Andalusia, Aragon, the Levant, Catalonia etc. The FAI dominated revolutionary committees organised many risings, as well as a successful campaign to boycott the elections, but each rising focused on a new region, whilst the previous centre was too weak to make any serious effort. Never did all the regions where anarchism was strongest unite and rise simultaneously.

The FAI itself was split into various tendencies. Evidence for the political differentiation of the tendencies is sparse and sometimes contradictory. Abel Paz's book *El Anarcismo* (The Anarchist Movement), etc. the *crustistas* 'group' was involved in. Little information other than this and Parrot's *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* is available in English. More is available in Spanish memoirs, many published, and works such as C. Lorente's *Las Anarquistas Espagnoles et le Povoire*. Besides the *crustistas* group which included the Ascaso brothers, Durutti, G. Oliver and R. Sanz, there were other groups around H. Prieto and M. Buencases who appear to have developed a moderate line, and the proposal of Diego Abad de Santillan to advocate a planned economy run by the industrial unions in opposition to Federico Montseny's plan for a free federation of communes. Whilst Montseny's plan prevailed at the Zaragoza National Conference of the CNT in 1936, the alternative was partially implemented in the self-managed industries after July 1936.

The basis of the FAI up to 1936 was loose affinity groups which worked jointly with the important committees of the CNT.

Affinity groups such as the Nosotros were not political tendencies so much as support groups of friends. Nosotros was consistently radical and emphasised direct action but did not have a *live, more a group emphasis*. With this situation prevailing it is difficult to fully follow the developments within the FAI. By 1936 it had lost much of the independence that it had had before 1931 from the reformists and the then autonomous CNT. Differences seemed to spread through the FAI once it assumed the leadership of the CNT in 1931. Important differences were maintained by the regional divisions within the CNT. The Asturias consistently followed a policy of co-operation with the UGT. The Aragonese were hard line anarchists, hence the FAI inspired choice that it should be the seat of the National Committee up to 1936, rather than Barcelona which had a history of debate between 'purists' and 'Catalanists'. The National Committee naturally took on the political character of the city in which it resided, and by whose local federation it was elected.

Few theoreticians developed within the CNT. Perhaps the most noticeable was V. Ordoñez Fernandez who died in 1934. Ordoñez went into exile during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and participated in the international conference organised by supporters of the *Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, which was written by Russian exiles to draw on their experiences. In 1931 Ordoñez returned to Spain and participated in the Comedia congress where he supported the move to develop industrial federations. In 1932 he was one of the main speakers for the abstentionist campaign, but worried by the isolation of the CNT he spoke out in favour of a revolutionary alliance with the UGT. He pointed to the example of the unsuccessful revolution in Bavaria in 1919, where the socialists, communists, and anarchists (Landauer, Muham) had co-operated. His demand for an alliance on the basis of a five point plan influenced the Asturias. The points were:

1. Tactical planning, no co-operation with the bourgeoisie.
  2. Socialisation of the means of production, integration of the unemployed into the workforce, production for social wealth, not commodity production.
  3. Organ to integrate the economy.
  4. Recallable elected executives.
  5. The immediate aim of revolutionary workers' democracy.
- Unlike the other politicians, the CNT did have a clear idea that the coming revolution would be a proletarian one. At its Congress in 1936 a motion describing libertarian communism had been unanimously passed, by *revistas* and others alike. The conference ratified reunification with the 50,000 strong militia. The failure of the CNT was its lack of direction, and its lack of preparation to counter the coming military rising. A proposal that militias should be trained was defeated by one favouring the 'more anarchist' idea of guerrilla warfare. The

GLOSSARY

- Esquerra "Left", A bourgeois Catalan party.
- FILJ Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth.
- Generalitat The autonomous 'government' of Catalonia.
- GPU Gaijinist secret police.
- ILP Independent Labour Party.
- IWMA International Working Men's (sic) Assocn, anarcho-syndicalist international founded in Berlin in 1923.
- PCE Spanish Communist Party.
- PSOE Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (Second International).
- PSOP French Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party, a split from the Second International Party.
- SAP German Socialist Workers' Party, a split from the Second International party.
- sindicatos 'single unions'.
- unidos 'Workers' Solidarity', paper of the CNT in Barcelona.
- Olorra 'the thieries', CNT moderate faction as named because thirty of them signed a manifesto opposing tactic of unprepared spontaneous revolution advocated by the FAI.

political activity by entering them – they remained formally members of their organisations with the right to contribute to political decisions. Whilst they stayed in the cities the militia did not live in barracks but continued to live at home whenever possible, this meant that they were in much greater contact with other people and could not be separated from the political debate going on there.

Generally speaking they were complete improvisation; little or no preparation had been done. Although the CNT had collected arms from the unsuccessful Barcelona uprising of October 1934 there had been no training of militia, even after the return of the republic in 1936. At the CNT congress a motion proposed by the Nosotros had been defeated. This group had played an important part in defeating the congress. They had planted informers in the barracks to find out what the conspirators planned, and helped to lead the attacks on the barracks – some of them were killed. Later Durutti was to lead one of the columns that left to retake Zaragoza from the rebels. Each column was composed of a number of groups of 500 men who were in turn divided into groups of 100. The letter was directed by an elected 'captain', and by four representatives of the ¼ sections of each county. There was no rank as such; orders were given and obeyed not because an officer had been appointed to run the unit but because the unit had elected their representative and accepted the need for collective discipline. There was thus no specific officer corps. Everyone ate, slept and fought together, irrespective of their responsibilities. Nor was there any uniform – except that it was common to wear similar clothes white or black neckties. Given their lack of expertise professional soldiers were used – but had to be supervised. One column of soldiers and the revolutionaries leaving Valencia split up, with the soldiers mansuering the militia against the goal. The volunteers' enthusiasm did not make for a lack of effective armament, or ammunition. Whilst there were some lapses of discipline nothing could alter the basic problem for the militia after two weeks they had used up most of their ammunition. Although guerrillas in one or two small groups continued to be active, the Aragon front was to remain static for much of the war. The supply of arms was never effectively organised by the revolutionaries to ensure that they could move on. After the departure of the majority of the militia for Aragon and Valencia internal security was supervised by Patrols which developed throughout Barcelona. The majority of the members again belonged to the CNT (225 as against 145 – UGT: 138; Esquerra: 45 – POUM). The patrols were linked to an investigative commission and to Revolutionary Tribunals composed of representatives of the various parties. This new justice was free. All judicial records prior to the 19th July were burned. At the frontiers with France the old guards were also replaced.

Industrialisation in the town was less profound than in the countryside where the basic structure of life changed entirely. The necessity to improve a vast war industry, to produce explosives for the first time in Catalonia, and therefore to work long hours, and the socialisation of the urban economy. Again only one example can be given – Barcelona, the centre of anarchist Spain. The socialisation of the economy in Barcelona was undertaken spontaneously by the workers. The Catalan regional committee of the CNT had merely ordered a general strike and a resumption of work. Most of the larger businesses – railways, tram, engineering, electricity, etc. were collectivised in the first week of the revolution. One of the first measures was to reintegrate all the unemployed into their former jobs. Wages were often made equal, and increased. Some trades were substantially reorganised – wood and furniture, hatters, bakers, etc., with smaller shops being shut down in favour of more modern, economical ones. One of the important features of the revolution was the attempt to maintain the goodwill of technicians to help run the factory. In some cases they were granted representation on executive bodies where their professional expertise was most needed, but they did not have any greater power over hiring and firing or other day to day matters, which were generally controlled by the two major unions working together (the POUM union seems to have disappeared by 1936).

Collectives

One of the most interesting features of the Spanish revolution was the reorganisation of the economy attempted both in industry and agriculture. Trotsky acknowledged that the cultural level of the Spanish revolution was way ahead of that of the Russian one. The CNT was after all an anarcho-syndicalist union and considered that the reorganisation of economic life – and its management by the workers themselves – was one of the touchstones of any revolution. One of the grounds for rejecting links with the Communist International which the CNT had provisionally joined was the CNT's refusal to accept that either trade unions should be subordinated to parties, or that the workers should have little or no power to manage the economy through co-ordinated decision making. It is impossible in a short space to outline even the wealth of experience of self-management in the revolution. Readers can easily obtain G. Level: *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, and S. Dolgoff: *The Anarchist Collectives*. Most of the material here is from F. Mintz: *L'Autogestion dans l'Esgare Revolutionnaire*, which is unavailable in English. Mintz summarises the extent of collectives in agriculture as involving by July 1939 0.4m people in 802 collectives. He estimates that 1.5m people overall were involved in these experiments. The extent of the anarchist movement in the countryside is remarkable because the CNT was by 1936 a largely urban organisation. Aragon, which was protected from the intrusion of the community by its geo-

graphical position and the presence of the revolutionary militia until late 1937 provides the most developed picture of rural revolution. Whereas Popular Front administrations were organised after on elsewhere, the Council of Aragon was not recognised until December 1936 by the central government, even then half its members were in the CNT, and one in the syndicalist party. Only three quarters of the province was unoccupied by the Francoists. A CNT organised congress of collectives attracted representatives from 80,000 workers before May 1936 there were only 34,000 CNT members over all of Aragon, Navarre and Rioja. The 275 collectives were grouped into 23 federations. Of 0.4m inhabitants 69.5% were involved in collectives, running 70% of the land, according to one estimate. Many had done away with money internally – distribution was made either by rationing, by the use of collectives' own credit notes, or totally freely. A few were able despite the war to begin improvements – machinery, irrigation, etc. Generally speaking wages were paid to the family, with wives and children receiving an unequal share. Schools were often set up for the first time. Most collectives voluntarily set large amounts of food to the front. The basic structure of all the collectives was similar. Those that joined it shared out their land and worked in small groups run by their own representative. Priorities were decided by general vote. Most of the work was done by the collectives were formed near parts of the front where the POUM and PSUC were active too, and independently of the CNT. Relations with the UGT varied: the CNT policy was that the small landowners who joined the UGT to protect themselves against the revolution should only be allowed to work land which they could use themselves. A few of the collectives agreed that a bank should be set up – not an interest earning bank, but a bank for the exchange of commodities between collectives, between town and country, and for international purchases.

**Industry**

Industrialisation in the town was less profound than in the countryside where the basic structure of life changed entirely. The necessity to improve a vast war industry, to produce explosives for the first time in Catalonia, and therefore to work long hours, and the socialisation of the urban economy. Again only one example can be given – Barcelona, the centre of anarchist Spain. The socialisation of the economy in Barcelona was undertaken spontaneously by the workers. The Catalan regional committee of the CNT had merely ordered a general strike and a resumption of work. Most of the larger businesses – railways, tram, engineering, electricity, etc. were collectivised in the first week of the revolution. One of the first measures was to reintegrate all the unemployed into their former jobs. Wages were often made equal, and increased. Some trades were substantially reorganised – wood and furniture, hatters, bakers, etc., with smaller shops being shut down in favour of more modern, economical ones. One of the important features of the revolution was the attempt to maintain the goodwill of technicians to help run the factory. In some cases they were granted representation on executive bodies where their professional expertise was most needed, but they did not have any greater power over hiring and firing or other day to day matters, which were generally controlled by the two major unions working together (the POUM union seems to have disappeared by 1936).

The economy suffered from two problems – firstly, one in four factories suffered from a lack of raw materials from abroad and from Francoist Spain; and secondly from lack of finance. In September 1936 a regional plan of 200 unions passed a motion that left it open for unions to collectivise generally; the CNT also made some attempts to set up a labour bank which would be used to co-ordinate exchanges between co-operatives, in August 1937. Another novel feature of the collectives was the development of social and health measures to improve workers' standards of living which were free. Abortion became legal for the first time. One of the significant features of the Spanish revolution was the development of a women's organisation. Mujeres Libres began in Madrid where a women's group began to teach women how to read and write. By 1938 it was a 30,000 strong movement organised throughout republican Spain. While it did not develop specifically



as a feminist organisation, feminist views did develop in it. Emma Goldman wrote in the December 1936 issue of their paper that whilst class or sexual oppression existed there could be no revolution. The war allowed many women to enter jobs for the first time. Mujeres Libres helped this development along; although many of the jobs were still preserves for men, women were organised for work in transport, sanitation, health, food, etc. The groups also organised crèches in factories. Simultaneously Federica Montseny, an FAI member who became Minister of Health, helped to provide birth control and legalised abortion. The organisation of the Mujeres Libres group was a positive step, helping women to become aware of and fight against their oppression; e.g. Pepita Carpena ... at first I was not very enthusiastic, but later I realised that there was a vast work to do among ourselves'.

Although it is difficult to describe there were more general aspects to the revolution. Abel Paz talks of militants who didn't sleep for days. George Orwell notes that everyone called each other tu, and comrades, instead of being formal. Clothes changed. Revolution came from abroad. Papers were printed on the capitalists' press. Buildings were taken over. Churches and fascists were burnt and killed. Prisoners were freed, even criminals, some of whom went to the front in the Iron column near Valencia. The libertarian youth organised a popular university. The revolution and the counter-revolution that followed effected all areas of life.

## Failure

Although a proletarian revolution obviously began, why did it fail? If any reader still doubts the bourgeois character of the PCE, B. Bolletien in *The Grand Camouflage* provides a detailed exposure of their activities. The PCE and its Catalan PSUC played a crucial role in defeating the revolution. They opened their parties to all the opponents of collectivisation and militias and supported the parliamentary forms of government. The PCE was at the centre of a coalition whose nominal head may have been republican, or socialist, but whose strength depended on the flow of Russian arms, to approved police units. These arms were used to revive the police forces which were powerless in July and August. By December 1936 40,000 Carabineros and 28,000 national Republican Guards were created anew, with arms that were needed on the front. These troops and others led by Lister formed regular but communist troops in the popular army, and were used to destroy the collectives of the Levant and Aragon in 1937/8. For the bourgeois PCE it mattered most to destroy anything that savoured of revolution under the pretence that such 'excesses' were frightening off potential help from the liberal democracies. In reality this policy fitted in with Stalin's. Stalin had made a pact with Franco to frighten Nazi Germany. However if one looks at the dates of arms supplied to Spain by the USSR one notes that virtually no

arms were supplied to Spain after late in 1937. Instead Stalin made a pact to divide up Poland with Hitler. No one can doubt that the PCE meant to destroy the revolution with its slogan of 'The war first'.

## Dilemmas

The problem posed to the revolutionary left was of how to defend and extend the revolution, and win the war at the same time. Essentially an explanation for the defeat of the revolution and the victory of Franco has to relate to the way the revolutionary left faced this problem.

Why did the CNT not build the revolution? No Libertarian Communist — first crush the enemy where he is! (*Solidaridad Obrera* 21-7-36). ... the government of the Popular Front in Spain is no more than the reflection of a compromise between the petty bourgeois and international capital' (*Sol. Ob.* 3-9-36). When after the CNT had joined the national government in Madrid (4-10-37), 'circumstances have ... changed the nature of the Spanish state and government, it has ceased at this moment as the regulator of the organs of the state or to be an oppressive force against the working class' (*Sol. Ob.*).

Durruti seems to have believed that there would be an anarchist seizure of power, after Zaragoza was taken. Santillan, according to Abel Paz, proposed 'democratic collaboration', not dictatorship, i.e. rule by the CNT alone would be against anarchist principles, and might provoke armed intervention from foreign powers. After a few weeks of this policy G. Oliver who at first had argued that revolution was inseparable from the war told Durruti in August 1936



*bourgeoisie, when one attacks foreign property, when public order is in the hands of the workers, when the militia is controlled by the unions, when, in fact, one is in the process of making a revolution from the bottom up, how is it possible to give this a legal basis?*

These are just some of the arguments that went on in the CNT. The arguments of the Nouvotro group appear to have been defeated by Santillan and the ex-trentistas first in Barcelona where the tide of revolu-

tion was strongest, later in national meetings where the representative of the CNT from outside Catalonia (where the CNT was

weaker and therefore more liable to pressure from outside groups) all reinforced this compromise.

Two arguments need consideration: (1) What was the effect of the policies adopted? (2) Was there any alternative?

The most persuasive argument appears to be that the CNT had to be moderate to win foreign aid. The CNT seems to have had some naive ideas about this aid. One article in *Solidaridad Obrera* gave uncritical praise to the USSR, without asking who the arms would go to. In any case all the arms went to repress the revolution as much as to fight at the front. Operations launched in the Balearics to entangle Britain and France against Italy, on the grounds that neither party would allow the other to gain influence, achieved nothing.

In fact the policy of placating the liberal democracies had great costs. It meant that the revolution made no attempt to destroy Franco's base in Morocco by supporting an anti-imperialist struggle. Spain also accepted that there should be no attack on Algeciras where troops arrived from Morocco. Thus the Spanish navy, which remained in republican hands for most of the war, was left idle, where it could have struck an important blow. Britain was unhappy about warfare in the vicinity of its base at Gibraltar. The government compromise also related to the use of the Bank of Spain's gold deposits. The IWWA had co-operated in a plan to use the money to buy arms after the gold had been seized by a force led by Durruti and Santillan. The latter however developed cold feet at the thought of alienating the government of Madrid. Subsequently the gold went to Russia and the arms deliveries ceased.

The effect of the policy of working within the parliamentary institutions which the CNT leadership developed from the beginning of July, also had counter-revolutionary effects on the development of the armed forces. Whilst the leaders worried about imposing dictatorship, the forces were recruited that were to retake Barcelona. Whilst some anarchists were saying we must take Zaragoza before building libertarian communism in Barcelona, the PSUC prepared for the confrontations of May 1937. The CNT accepted the destruction of the watch committees at a time when the Spanish branch of the GPU prepared for the murder of embarrassing militants. The leader of the POUM, A. Nin, was taken by the GPU and killed, possibly in Moscow. Other well known militants disappeared, notably Camillo Berneri. Rumours persist that Durruti was shot from behind. Meanwhile at the front militarisation was accepted. Concessions were won, all the CNT units being kept together, but militarisation still meant the destruction of revolutionary self-discipline in favour of regimentation. C. Mera who at the Zaragoza CNT Congress had opposed militias (he wanted guerrilla warfare) ended up by making a speech where he declared that as a General he would no longer speak to an ordinary soldier!

## Economy

Within the economy there were two problems: finance and the UGT. The failure of the CNT to destroy the capitalist economy, its failure to organise and plan the economy for itself meant that raw materials for collectives were not secured, orders for uniforms were sometimes made abroad rather than going to revolutionaries. The PSUC used its positions to reverse collecti-



that it was necessary to build the revolution secretly from within a government. He replied: 'When the workers expropriate the

tion was strongest, later in national meetings where the representative of the CNT from outside Catalonia (where the CNT was

## Libertarian Spain

The revolution and civil war in Spain in 1936-1939 contained some of the greatest moments in the history of the European working-class.

It is important for libertarians to remember that the largest single organisation of the working-class in Spain was the CNT, the anarco-sindicalist trade union.

Today, 40 years on, does the libertarian tradition have any importance in Spain?

The answer to that question must undoubtedly be yes. Despite being ignored by most of the revolutionary Left in Britain, the Libertarian movement has grown rapidly since the death of Franco. The CNT is growing rapidly, and now has perhaps as many as 30,000 members. As important, it seems to have learnt from the mistakes it made in the Civil War.

The Libertarian Spain Committee believes that solidarity work with Spanish libertarians is vital for us in Britain, and sees Spain as "the weak link in European capitalism."

Libertarian Spain, bulletin of the LSC, is available for 20p inc. postage, bundles of 5 for £1 cash with order, from LSC, 136 Burley Rd, Leeds 4. No 1, still available, covers the rebirth of the CNT, the June elections, economic and political background. No 2, available from January, covers recent developments, the counter-culture etc.



visations in industry; e.g. they resurrected small bakeries to win the support of their petty bourgeois allies, and in the process created a bread shortage that led to large queues for bread in the working class suburbs whilst restaurants had plenty for the rich. Collectives were not integrated so that there were examples of workers being beaten up for asking for payment of bills. Whilst the CNT pursued an alliance with the UGT it compromised itself as the defender of the workers' collectives. When a pact was finally signed it represented the organisations' bureaucracies — but not the workers' movement.

There was no involvement in planning who should produce what within each factory assembly. Durrutti had prophesied a 'state socialist' economy more or less correctly. The policy of compromise pursued by the CNT therefore implied the negation of the revolution. The right wing tendencies who argued that the state was no longer repressive took hold of the movement through bureaucratic means, just as they were using similar means to run the economy and army. Opposition papers which did not reflect the line of the central CNT leadership were banned. No assemblies of CNT members took place to ratify the decisions that were taken. The national committee was supervised by permanent regional delegates, rather than delegates who had to report always to their own assemblies. In this context the organisation of national Industrial Federations to replace the *sindicatos únicos* reinforced the bureaucracy of the CNT. Similar processes took place in the FAI too. The development of these trends therefore implied a destruction of the revolutionary organisations and their replacement by a bureaucracy of full time officials representing an organisation whose members were silent and censored.

*Politically the development of these tendencies compromised the CNT as a revolutionary class organisation.*

The political alternative to this betrayal developed in many places.

Camilo Berneri wrote some erudite articles about revolutionary governments exposing both the Leninists and the ministers. In December 1936 he wrote '... There is a smell of Noske in the air. If Madrid were not in flames one would be obliged to recall Kronstadt ... The dilemma 'Madrid or Franco' has paralysed Spanish anarchism. Today Barcelona is situated between Burgos, Rome, Berlin, Madrid and Moscow. Besieged ... we can still perform miracles. Caught between the Prussians and Versailles, the commune lit a fire which still lights the world. Between Burgos and Madrid there is Barcelona ...'

The Mujeres Libres group made a novel demand on the rest of the anarchist movement. They asked that they should be given equal representation with the FAI, FIJL, and CNT.

Many in the militias refused to accept the decrees that mobilised them as part of the popular army.

In March 1937 a federation of collectives attacked by state police organised a defence front between themselves.

The FIJL organised a campaign in defence of the patrol committees who were ordered by the government to surrender their arms.

Perhaps the culmination of this opposition was the alliance formed in the streets in May 1937, when the PSUC attempted to intimidate the workers' organisations. Rank and file CNT members, POUMists, a few Bolshevik-Leninists (Trotskyists), and an illicit CNT group, the Friends of Durrutti united behind the barricades. In May they had condemned the CNT leadership with

this manifesto: '... We are the friends of Durrutti and we have sufficient authority to condemn those individuals who through incapacity and fear have betrayed the working class. Whilst we have more enemies in front of us they gave power to Companys again (the leader of the Generalitat), public order to the reactionary government of Valencia, and the defence commissariat to General Pozas — treason is immense.' They called for a revolutionary junta of workers, peasants and soldiers.

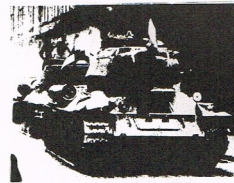
Later they declared: 'G. Oliver, F. Montseny and the leadership of the CNT have permitted the stalinists and assault guards to cruelly assassinate C. Berneri and the young F. Ferrer ... since 19 July the anarchist leaders have capitulated many times before the demands of the bourgeoisie and in the name of anti-fascist unity have arrived at openly betraying the working class. Anti-fascist unity has been only subordination to the bourgeoisie — it has entailed the military victories of Franco and the counter-revolution at the rear ...'

*'To beat Franco we need to beat Companys and Caballero. To beat fascism we need to crush the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist and socialist allies. The capitalist state must be destroyed totally and there must be installed workers' power depending on rank and file workers' committees. Apolitical Anarchism has failed. To beat the bloc of the bourgeoisie and its allies — Stalinists, socialists, CNT leaders — the workers must break clearly with traitors on all sides. Their vanguard, i.e. the revolutionary militants of the friends of Durrutti, POUM, and the youth, must regroup to elaborate a programme of proletarian revolution.'*

Berneri was dead. The revolution was dead. Between Burgos and Madrid Barcelona had died isolated, but still struggling.

## Libertarian Communist supplements

### Hungary



The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a watershed in working class history. This supplement describes the growing opposition to Stalinism, the uprising, and the eventual crushing of the revolution.



Russia 1917 describes the economic background to the revolution and tries to understand how and why the Bolsheviks became increasingly unresponsive to the real needs of the working class.

### Russia

France 1968—the May-June events proved that revolution can still be on the agenda in the present day in Western Europe.

### France



All 3 supplements are available—Hungary 5p, Russia and France 10p +postage from LCG 27 Clerkenwell Close, E.C.1.



7/50R/3/56/14

# Libertarian Communist

Special Supplement 10p



**RUSSIA  
1917**

10K



13000 fully armed soldiers from Kronstadt arrive at Petrograd to fight the White general Kornilov. Lenin called them the 'flower of the revolution.'

The revolutionary process in Russia was associated with widespread discontent. Russia's participation in the imperialist First World War had placed tremendous strain on all aspects of society.

Although the war initially supplied some industrialists with considerable gains, it rapidly rendered the Russian economy derelict. For example, by the end of 1916 iron and steel production had fallen to 1/6 of its 1914 level, and coal production to 1/10 of its 1914 level. The rail transport system had come completely unstuck, with 1/3 of its locomotives out of commission waiting for repairs. The Russian general staff had mobilised some 15 million men, an estimated 1/3 of the male agricultural and industrial workforces, draining the land of manpower in order to form an army which they were increasingly unable to supply with munitions and basic necessities.

In the countryside the area of cultivated land was contracting and yield had declined by as much as 1/3. Starvation haunted the factories and the front; yet inflation made the richer peasants increasingly reluctant to part with their surplus produce above what they needed to sell to pay taxes.

What is known as the February Revolution was essentially the beginning of two simultaneous tendencies. On the one hand, all sections of the masses began to take actions and to raise demands directed towards the alleviation of those grievances which the war had either created or worsened. The soldiers wanted food (and an end to the war); the factory workers, food and an end to the miserable conditions of their employment; the peasants, land enough to give them security from the vagaries of the market and freedoms from the landowners, merchants and tax collectors who were their scourge. On the other hand, there was a succession of provisional governments which failed either to crush these protests or to end them by finding solutions to the underlying problems.

Why did these governments fail? Partly because the disaffection of the soldiers limited their capacity for repressive action, but also partly because they were governments of the bourgeoisie which felt itself threatened by every aspiration of the masses.

**Capital**  
The sort of social development associated with the bourgeoisie in America and

# RUSSIA

The last months of 1917 have seen the socialist press publish many celebrations of the 1917 Russian Revolution. The interpretation of this major episode in working-class history is one of the areas in which Libertarian Communists take a rather different attitude from that of those revolutionaries anxious to be of a 'Leninist' or 'Trotskyist' tradition.

The Libertarian Communist Group admits, however, that a comprehensive and agreed libertarian alternative has yet to be produced. What we present here, therefore, is by no means a group position. It is rather an individual viewpoint, which we hope exhibits the spirit of criticism we feel on this subject as a group, whilst contributing to the ongoing process of resolving this problem by new analyses.

Western Europe had not take place in Russia. The political ambitions and competence of the Russian bourgeoisie were determined by their particular history. Their main characteristics were that they were dominated by foreign capital, their resources were often concentrated in large and modern plants, and they tended to be subservient to a state apparatus which could claim substantial responsibility for their existence. The Russian bourgeoisie did not sociologically or economically merge with the proletariat through intermediate layers of urban petty bourgeoisie. They were, on the contrary, acutely aware of the gulf between themselves and the large concentrations of workers in the factories. They were accustomed not to side with these latter against the autocratic state, but rather to call upon this state to obliterate all manifestations of independent proletarian activity. The Russian bourgeoisie cursed the imperial bureaucracy for its inefficiency and rallied against the privileges of the court faction, but they had, and needed, little political programme of their own beyond

the hope of 'a united government composed of men enjoying the confidence of the country'. They dare not even stir up the peasantry, entangled as they were in a web of commercial interests with the major landlords and fearful of any change in established property relations. Involvement in the war was itself a consequence of the combined interests of the autocracy and the bourgeoisie. Foreign control of leading sectors of industrial growth (e.g. of 60% of the output of pig iron) and especially of the money supply (e.g. 85% of Petrograd's bank resources were in foreign hands on the eve of the Revolution) gave an economic rationale to the military alliances. The bourgeoisie hoped, moreover, that success in battle would bring renewed economic and political gains in Turkey, Afghanistan and Poland.

**Property**  
Once the autocracy had been blown away, it became increasingly evident that the bourgeois parties and those socialists who put their faith in a 'bourgeois stage' in

the revolutionary process had nothing to offer. The key contribution of the Bolsheviks between February and October was to define the question of the agency through which could be accomplished those measures whose absence kept the masses in turmoil—the ending of the war, confiscation of land by the peasants, satisfaction of the workers' grievances in industry—as a question of class power.

The issue of bourgeois property was hardly ever raised directly by the mass movements of the period, except insofar as the land expropriations of the peasants threatened it or the weak class-anarchist current could get a hearing. In general terms the question of bourgeois property was only raised indirectly, through the medium of the political consequences the bourgeoisie felt necessary for its survival.

October saw the removal of the bourgeoisie from power at least insofar as it saw the removal of its representatives from the government and the abandoning of the political objectives with which it had associated itself.

**Soviets**  
A new organisation, the Soviets, had emerged as the location for the formulation of social objectives, an organisation associated with the participation and the policies of the previously oppressed social classes, the workers and eventually the peasants. This political expropriation provided the context for an entire social reconstruction. The capacity for organization and struggle provided by the proletariat along with the allegiance of the soldiers, had laid down the conditions for the working people of both town and country to begin to determine the nature of their own work according to their own assessment of social needs and objectives. Or had it?

We know now that somewhere, somewhere along the line, the workers and the peasants went to get left out of the process. Whereas under capitalism workers are alienated because social priorities are ultimately ordered and controlled by the accumulation of capital, the Russian workers were rapidly to find they had almost as little influence over the ordering and control of a bureaucratic planning which, if it did not behave in exactly the same way as capital, seemed nevertheless just as remote and alien.

Let's consider for a moment this question





INDUSTRY: Oil wells at Baku before the revolution.

of involvement. On the one hand its failure to appear in the Soviet planning process did not prevent the accomplishment of tasks which a Russian capitalism, as dependent on imperial capital, might well have found impossible should it somehow have survived the state to which it was brought by the war. On the other hand, in purely productive terms its significance would surely have been of a positive nature in terms of the accurate assessment of objective, potential capacities etc. Whats more, workers who know why they are working and feel an interest in their work tend to work better. I believe, however, that it is as wrong on this side of the argument to leave matters exclusively at the level of productive efficiency as it is to ignore it. We have an interest in the rationalisation and planning of the productive forces insofar as such objectives coincide with our total species development.

The understanding of, and responding to, social needs and capacities by each of us individually as part of the collective, changes not merely the "how" of production, but also the "what" and the "why". That is the importance of the mass self-determination of labour in the revolutionary process.

What happened to the mass self-determination of labour in Russia? We could slip here into total and unapologetic fatalism. We could stop at pointing out that for us to seize hold of the world there must be ideal conditions for the revolution the world over. We see that from its onset the Russian Revolution was hampered by the non-occurrence of revolution elsewhere, in that workers aid from advanced industrial nations was not forthcoming, whilst imperialist counter-revolution was. We see that this placed the task of reconstruction in the context of a small and shattered industry hung in potential tension, with an overwhelming mass of newly independent peasant-farmers. We can see that both the Russian workers and the peasants were but poorly developed in terms of technical, cultural, organisational and political experience. These were certainly daunting problems.

Nevertheless, it is only after we have turned ourselves that everything possible was done that could have been done to sustain the mass self-determination of labour, even under these conditions, that we can allow ourselves the judgement that the disappearance of this component to the degree seen in Russia was unavoidable.

## Lenin

Of particular interest to us should be the

## THE TERROR

It is worth mentioning here the general question of repression in this period. From the very first days of the Revolution the vitality of the mass movement was endangered by the harassment, official and semi-official, of critics of the Bolsheviks. As early as December 1917 the 'Cheka', the 'Extraordinary Commission', had emerged from the Petrograd military-revolutionary committee, and it had not been too sensitive in its

search for 'counter-revolutionary' activities. The Bolsheviks do not appear to have advocated the right of appeal of all suspected 'counter-revolutionaries' to their local Soviet. Instead, only Sovnarkom, if that, had control over the 'terror'. Indeed, this 'terror' varied widely in practicability to times it was of a fairly petty nature, for instance, Voline writes in his *Unknown Revolution* of the cutting off of

performance of the revolutionary leadership, the Bolsheviks. That so much was achieved was due to the fact that the workers and soldiers in particular relied behind the posing by the Bolsheviks of the necessity for a new power in Russia. Without this consolidation of the idea of a new social organization, the way would have been left open for the autocrat and the bourgeoisie to impose a most violent and



All-Russian Congress of Factory and Shop Committees.

bloody retribution.

For the rest of this article, however, we must proceed to look at, as it were, the other side of the Bolshevik coin, in terms of the posing of the issue of social power.

The big question, of course, is the one of how the Bolsheviks related the party itself to this change in social power. I interpret the dominant tendency in the Bolsheviks to have been one that tended to conflate the Party and the exercise of power by the proletariat (also understanding this exercise of power to be the proletariat's way of leading the peasantry). This tendency was the one represented by Lenin. A next expression of the conflation comes, for instance, in his work *On Compromises*. He said

"Our Party, like any political party, is

electricity supplies to the print works of the Anarcho-Syndicalist paper *Golos Truda*, and of the jostling and chasing away of its street sellers etc. It could also amount to repression of sizeable proportions, for instance, in April 1918, the Cheka seized Anarchists of all tendencies, from partisans to pacifists. Whatever its specific manifestations, the general characteristic of the terror and its lack of responsibility to contribut Soviet institutions undoubtedly contributed in its own way to the centralising ossification of the Revolution.

striving after political domination for itself. Our aim is the dictatorship of the revolutionary proletariat." A rather vague expression of the same thing occurs in the better known work *Left Wing Communism*.

"The mere presentation of the question of dictatorship of the party or dictatorship of the class 'sanctifies to the most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking . . . It is common knowledge . . . that at a rule and in most cases . . . classes are led by political parties.

It is also possible, of course, to find passages of Lenin in which he seems to emphasize the sovereignty of the Soviets rather than that of the Party. In Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power? for instance, he wrote of the Soviets

"This apparatus, by virtue of the fact that its personnel is elected and subject to recall at the peoples will without bureaucratic formalities, is far more democratic than any previous apparatus." In the final analysis, it is to the practice of the Bolsheviks to which we must turn. There we see a practice which reveals a repeated emphasis upon the Party, especially on the Party as government, rather than upon the right to involve the workers and peasants in the Soviets as decision-making bodies, where the leading role of the proletariat, insofar as it is still had one could be expressed politically.

The organisation and accomplishment of October was the responsibility not of the Soviets as a whole, but rather of the



All-Russian Congress of Factory and Shop Committees.

Bolshevik dominated Petrograd Soviet and its military-revolutionary committee. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets merely ratified the event, and legitimised a 'provisional workers and peasants government' which was to direct affairs until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly'.

This provisional government consisted of the Bolshevik-dominated Council of Peoples Commissars (Sovnarkom) and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK). When the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened in January 1918, however, it found itself again more or less ratifying a decision to dissolve the Constituent Assembly already executed by the VTsIK, but the Second Congress had left behind. Or rather, by a VTsIK which had more than doubled its size since then: 108 delegates had been added by the peasant congress in November, another 100 had appeared from the army and the fleet, and 50 from the Trades Unions.

As a result of these events, the crucial opening period of the Revolution was marked by considerable confusion as to where decision making and political power were actually located. This confusion was not limited to the question of the competence of the All-Russian Congresses.

There was further confusion between VTsIK and Sovnarkom. The latter body conferred legislative power on itself by a decree of 30th Oct 1917. In doing so it admitted 2 qualifications. Its powers were to be valid 'only to the convocation of the Constituent Assembly' and VTsIK had the power to 'defer, modify or annul' any of its enactments. Within a week of the passing of this decree non-Bolsheviks in VTsIK were

protesting at the extent to which Sovnarkom was governing with previous submission to VTsIK. A resolution supporting Sovnarkom in this was passed, however, and thereafter Sovnarkom began to operate with increasing independence.

The constitution eventually passed by the 5th All-Russian Congress did nothing to counteract the lack of initiative of the Soviets and the drift of power away from VTsIK to Sovnarkom. The crucial point, however, is that there was no attempt by the Bolsheviks to prevent this contraction of political influence.

In the period between the insurrection and the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly they had spread confusion as to whether the Assembly or the Soviets were to be the sovereign organisation, eventually making a complete about turn on the matter. They had not consistently fought in the Soviets for the Soviets to proclaim their sovereignty. As events proceeded they were to show further unwillingness to take matters into the Soviets. They were also to show themselves unable to foster initiatives taken by the workers outside the Soviets.

## Peace

No doubt in the early days many Soviet delegates had been engaged in heated discussion in their localities over the questions upon which they would be called upon to ratify a decision. In the case of the insurrection and the dismissing of the



All-Russian Congress of Factory and Shop Committees.

Constituent Assembly there does not seem to have been much disagreement. However, on the question of the peace negotiations with Germany, there was disagreement, and this makes it a good issue around which to study the participation of the Soviets in government in their heyday.

It is particularly important here to separate the question of the rights or wrongs of the Best-Litovks settlement from the way in which it was achieved. There was considerable disagreement at the time on the matter. On the one hand those who saw the need for a settlement even at the price of aggression and the front coupled with propaganda and partisan resistance to any offensive would provide both a workable military strategy and also an inspiration to the workers of Europe. According to the bourgeois historian Shapiro (Origins of the Communist Autocracy), the government went so far as to take a referendum of the views of some of the Soviets and found that a majority were in favour of the second course of action outlined above.

Given the length of the negotiations and the strength of feeling in the country, this was an issue on which the Bolsheviks could

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have sought the widest possible debate, and made the final decision of all the Soviets. Debate was certainly fierce in VTsIK and the Bolshevik Party, but it does not appear to have been politically centralised outside these bodies. Certainly, the extraordinary 4th All-Russian Congress of Soviets of March 1918 was called merely to ratify the treaty.

It was the way the decision was taken as much as the actual settlement which had tremendous repercussions on the Soviets. In particular the main non-Bolshevik party, the Left Social Revolutionaries, lost confidence in the Soviets and proceeded to appeal to the workers and peasants to take up arms against the Germans, without the sanction of the Soviets. The German ambassador, Nirbach, was assassinated, and clashes occurred between revolutionary partisan units and troops loyal to VTsIK. As a result the Left Social Revolutionaries were expelled from VTsIK, and their presses were closed down.

In the handling of decisions relating to the Constituent Assembly, and to the peace, and in the operation of the terror, we see components of the decline of mass involvement in the Soviets. We see that the Bolsheviks did not seek to foster this involvement, and indeed, through their handling of the terror and of the organisation of the Soviets, served to hinder it. The progressive alienation of Soviet power was not simply a matter of the quality of involvement in the Soviets themselves. This was particularly true with regard to the proletariat, and its relations with the entire sector of public life associated with the management of the economy.

In the general upsurge after February 1917 the Soviets had not been the only form of working-class organisation to develop. Many industrial enterprises had seen the founding of plant based workers committees. On May 20th 1917 a conference of such factory committees in Petrograd defined themselves as 'fighting organisations elected on the basis of the widest democracy' seeking to create 'new conditions at work' and the 'organisation of thorough control of labour over production and distribution'. Individual committees seem to have varied from types of trade union branch to revolutionary organisations of the shop floor.

On October 17th 1917, however, an all-Russian conference of such committees called for the passing of all power to the Soviets, mainly due to the Bolsheviks having a majority at the conference.

The existence of the factory committees movement raised important questions about the running of the economy in the post-October period. The first of these was whether or not the factory committees could assume 'ownership' of their places of work. The Bolshevik conception was quite clearly that Soviet power did not involve actual expropriation of the bourgeoisie. They did not propose any sweeping measures of confiscation.

The Bolsheviks envisaged a controlled or directed capitalism, "state capitalism" in Lenin's words, arrived at by such measures as the nationalisation of credit. However, this strategy collapsed rapidly even before the introduction of "war communism". In many places the employers simply fled, in others they were summarily deposed.

Repeated Soviet decrees stating the need for



Anarchist banner in the Ukraine.

government approval of any expropriation went unheeded. The Bolsheviks could do little to curb this movement.

Mixed up with the problem of whether or not to take over the factories was the wider problem of what the basis was to be for assessing and implementing economic objectives, and what role the factory committees were to play in these processes.

## Solution

The Bolshevik solution to the problem involved the effective subordination of the organs of working-class power to officials appointed by the state. On November 14th VTsIK passed a decree on workers control which laid down what the factory committees could and could not do. Factory committees were to remain in control of their individual enterprises, but were to be ultimately under the control of the "All-Russian Council of Workers Control", which was itself dominated by representatives of the Trades Unions. (The general relation of the factory committees to the Trades Unions is by no means clear, but the committees do seem to have been at this stage the more authentic rank and file movement.) Moreover, 'in all enterprises of state importance' (A phrase which could mean anything) all factory representatives were to be 'answerable to the State for the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property'.

Following the passing of the decree a projected All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees was prevented from meeting. Eventually, on December 5th 1917, a further step was taken with the creation of the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenka), empowered to work out 'a plan for the organisation of the economic life of the country and the financial resources of the government'. A few members of the All-Russian Council of Workers Control, now subordinate to Vesenka, did sit on this new body, but they were outnumbered by representatives of the Commissariats and by specialists appointed by the government.

In the space of a few months, therefore, the skeleton of a planning system was erected which gave exceedingly little scope to the initiative and involvement of the working class through its factory organisation. Decisions about economic priorities were to be increasingly taken by state departments connected with the working class neither through the Soviets nor through any separate organisation based on the factory committees. It was not long before the combination of undernourished centralisation of control, civil war, increased economic chaos and demoralisation began to threaten even those rights in plant organisation which the factory committees had fought for and won. (Some latter-day Leninists point to the economic chaos as an example of how badly the committees fared without central control. How they could develop more than "parochial" interests when they were repeatedly being cut off

the ability to recognise that the class came above the individual factory, and the desire to be involved in the formulation of class wide objectives. From the first day the Bolsheviks opposed rather than encouraged this ability and desire.

## Kronstadt

We can see, I hope, that there are, at least, cases to be further investigated with regard to the ability of the Russian masses to sustain involvement in the revolutionary process. Although the Bolsheviks contributed to the circumstances where such activity and involvement could flourish, they failed to fight for it, and eventually actively hindered it. What's more, still other features of the Russian Revolution could be considered in this light, were it not for lack of space.

The experience of Kronstadt is a well



PARTRIDGE SHOOT: Red Army soldiers massacre the sailors and inhabitants of the Kronstadt garrison. Throughout the firing the huge gun emplacement of the garrison remained facing out to sea, guarding against the possibility of White attack. The people of Kronstadt had insisted on carrying out re-elections for their Soviet. Trotsky said in his ultimatum to them: 'We will shoot you down like partridges'.

from centralised organisation is generally left unexplained.)

Lenin's Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government gives, as early as April 1918, an indication of how the Bolsheviks intended to cope with the problems. Among the measures he proposed were the introduction of piece-work, "Taylorian" systems of work organisation, a card system for registering the productivity of each worker, productivity bonuses and stricter discipline. He wrote "Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of labour processes that are based on large-scale machine industry... today the Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process".

The working class had been given no opportunity to express itself on these matters through the Soviets. Where it did express itself, through the factory committees, and later, to a certain extent, through the Trades Unions, it showed both

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The paper contains news, analysis, letters and reviews. In addition to articles of a theoretical and analytical nature—necessary to counteract the lack of attention that some libertarians in Britain have paid to theory in the past—the paper also has an agitational function, and will fight to develop and extend the class struggle.

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known example of how even after all the trials of the Civil War a section of the Russian fleet and proletariat could not only foresee for themselves some of the harmful aspects of the New Economic Policy but also raise some as their central demand the political one of free elections to the Soviets. For this they were miserably slandered and crushed by force of arms!

The experience of the Makhnovites in the Ukraine is a well known example of how the organisation of anti-capitalist regional autonomy was treated by a government pledged to minority rights of national self-determination. It was miserably slandered, double-crossed and crushed by force of arms!

Another interesting, but less well known area to investigate would be what happened to the soldiers' Soviets. It is a common apology of latter-day Leninists that the war disrupted Soviet democracy, yet this war also saw the development of a coherent army. What happened to Soviet democracy in that? Did it go out the door when Trotsky re-introduced many traditional features of military discipline?

## Analysis

I should end with some indication of what the consequences of the above analysis are for revolutionaries. Revolutionaries in a revolutionary situation have a crucial responsibility to raise the question of power—the organisation of the masses for their own ends. We should seek, however, the construction of a united and democratic organisation of this power, and see this as



THE BUREACRACY: Stalin in 1929. By this time any idea about socialism had long been forgotten.

the active force, rather than acting "on its behalf". We should not take a mandate from such an organisation to form a government, but rather fight for its own involvement in decision making.

We should be prepared for workers in struggle to throw up a plurality of organisations, and seek to develop these into a common unity, rather than stifle their development.

We must above all beware of those who may seek to develop these into a common

unity, rather than stifle their development.

We must above all beware of those who may seek to refer uncritically to the Bolsheviks' record as a source of prescriptions in crisis.

At all times, whether in revolutionary struggle or in the political tasks we undertake in the present day, the beacon towards which we steer is the mass self-determination of labour.

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## Libertarian Spain



# Libertarian Communist

Special Supplement

10p



*Sketching the limits of  
Trotsky*





# Sketching the limits of Trotsky

This supplement is by no means an attempt to draw a balance sheet of either Trotsky's or 'Trotskyism's' contribution to Marxist theory and to the international workers movement. It is an attempt to provide a basis for such a balance sheet by considering three areas of problems experienced by the socialist movement in the course of the revolutions of this century and placing Trotsky's views and contributions within them to give some indication of the limits of this contribution.

The areas examined are only schematically separated; they are: the role of the peasantry in the transition to socialism; the question of the relationship of socialist politics and organisation to class struggle in pre- and post-revolutionary situations, ie "Party and Class"; and the nature and significance of Stalinism, leading to the question of the class nature of the Soviet Union.

The absence of discussion concerning the theory of 'permanent revolution' stems not from a ready dismissal such as Gramsci's "nothing but a generic forecast presented as a dogma and which demolishes itself by not coming true" (Prison Notebooks p 241), but from the view that the examination of the role of the peasantry undermines shared assumptions of the theory and of its rival - 'national democratic revolution' in its various, Menshevik and Stalinist incarnations (though arguably not Lenin's discarded theory of the

In universal history, the actions of men have results which differ from what they plan and achieve, from their immediate knowledge and intentions. They achieve their aims, but there is produced at the same time something hidden within them, which their consciousness was not aware of and which was not included in their calculations.

HEGEL

(quoted in Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, Penguin, 1975)

'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. Trotsky's sketch of the combined and uneven development of capitalism in Russia (1) of the impossibilities for a colonial bourgeoisie to create an economy capable of competing in the world market (2), and therefore of the only possible route to economic development (3) are very graphic and persuasive. The usefulness of the theory is considerably affected by his view that the peasantry could only act as the subordinate ally of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. From this position Trotsky argued that only from an advanced technological base could collectivisation be accomplished (4).

The Chinese experience, in the middle 50's, of collectivisation achieving higher productivity without the existence of a technological basis proper to it (whether this is attributed to 'unused labour', 'mutual aid' or less prosaically the introduction of further division of labour) and on the basis of a seemingly voluntary mass movement of the

peasantry, has forced theories based upon such assumptions into contortions - the CPC 'substituted' for a proletariat denied a central role from 1927 to 1967. (5) The alternative is a more scientific task - the re-examination of the role of the peasantry.

It was in the light of the concept of combined and uneven development that Vera Zasulich questioned Marx in 1881 on "the future of (Russian) rural communities, and on the theory that insists that all the people of the world should be forced by historical necessity to go through all the stages of social production." Marx answered, "The historical inevitability of this tendency is expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe." In 1882, in a new preface to Plekhanov's new translation of the 'Manifesto', Marx and Engels said "We say that Russia today forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe... and what happens ON and TO the land may serve as the starting point for a communist development". Even a few years later, in a letter to Zasulich, Engels gave a cool reception to Plekhanov's

anti-Populist "Our Differences".

There was, therefore, some support from Marx and Engels for the Populist view that the rural commune might provide the basis for a transition to socialism avoiding capitalism altogether. The founding struggle of the current which was to become Russian Social Democracy was to establish the reality and inevitability of capitalist development in Russia (6). By 1894 Engels had accepted that the pace of capitalist development in Russia made developments based on the rural commune impossible as that institution was rapidly becoming unstable.

However, the limited duration of the possibility Marx and Engels saw is not the main point of interest but rather (a) the implicit assumption that the peasantry could be more than a primitive mass from which petit bourgeois and subsequently bourgeois evolutions would inevitably arise, and (b) that social democracy was founded in opposition to this peasant heresy [rather than on the question of terrorism (see Trotsky, *The Young Lenin* (7))].

The general premise of all social democrats in Russia prior to 1917 was that a bourgeois revolution was necessary and - inevitable - the questions debated were whether it was to be led by the bourgeoisie and whether its limits were prescribed by a period of inevitable bourgeois democratic rule. As Trotsky



says 'the mere characterisation of the (Russian) Revolution as bourgeois tells us nothing about the type of its internal development' (The Permanent Revolution, Pathfinder, 1969 p. 59).

Whatever the differences between the social democrats they were united in their estimation of the auxiliary role of the peasantry to more modern classes. This shared assumption also unites the factional positions within Bolshevik social democracy during the 1920s.

That Trotsky's attitude to the peasantry was consistent and largely deprecating is not difficult to establish by a brief survey of his views of a number of revolutionary movements. 'In order to realise the soviet state, there was required the drawing together and mutual penetration of two factors belonging to completely different historical species: a peasant war – that is a movement characteristic of the dawn of bourgeois development – and a proletarian insurrection, the movement signalling its decline.'

On the Chinese peasantry Trotsky notes (The Third International After Lenin, 1938) '(its) role will be neither leading nor independent. The poor peasants of Hupai, Kwangtung or Bengal can play a role, not only on a national but on an international scale, but only if they support the workers of Shanghai, Canton, Hankow and Calcutta' (p. 226). Further to this, the Chinese peasantry was 'never less capable of playing a leading role than the Russian' (p. 184).

Discussing the Spanish Revolution Trotsky hardly mentions the peasantry. When he does his programme is limited to that of the first stage of 1917, 'the land to the tillers' (7). As we know the revolution in the countryside had already extended far beyond this (8).

These points are more than a repetition of the factional accusations of 1922 that 'Trotsky underestimates the peasantry' (9) or of 1926 that 'Trotsky proposed to plunder the peasantry' (10). Despite the irregular propagandist appeals to poor peasants (a sure sign of grain crisis throughout the period), all factions in the Bolshevik party leadership were united in viewing the peasantry as incapable of independent mobilisation – they disagreed on the differentiation among the peasants, on the strength of the petty bourgeois tendencies in the countryside and therefore the reality and extent of the 'Kulak mine under the socialist position' (Joint Opposition Platform Summer 1927). It is hardly surprising therefore that in Trotsky's discussions of the period 'peasant' and 'counterrevolutionary' become interchangeable.

The alliance with, and subsequent betrayal and suppression of, the Makhnovist peasant movement in the Ukraine was explained by Trotsky in 1937 (11) as being due to the Makhnovists being 'Kulak cavalry', i.e. they were peasants, they were monarchists, therefore they were counterrevolutionary cavalry. There is a fine irony in this, that goes to the heart of the Bolshevik view of the peasantry. In 1920-21, when the Red Army Southern Front commanded by Frunze was to turn overnight against its allies in the previous days struggle against Wrangel (Trotsky also manages to insinuate that the Makhnovists aided Wrangel instead of spearheading his downfall) the pro-

clamations 'Forward against Makhnovism' denounced the 'anarchist bandits' for 'attacking the property of soviet citizens', i.e. the 'Kulak cavalry' were encouraging land requisition and collectivisation (12). As in Spain during the period of Trotsky's writing on this subject, the opponents of such 'petty-bourgeois' tendencies had to ally themselves with the landowners to secure a social base in the countryside (see Bolshoi, Grand Camouflage, et al. For a full discussion of the Makhnovist movement see Avrich, Voline, Arshinov (13).

The suppression of the rebellion of the Baltic garrison at Kronstadt in 1921 is explained by Trotsky, 'they reflected the hostility of the backward peasantry to the workers' – 'the hatred of the petty bourgeois for revolutionary discipline' (11). Again the use of 'peasant' is considered the supreme argument as to the counterrevolutionary nature of the revolt. Actually Trotsky missed a lot out in his 1937 'explanation'. He missed the 'white general in command at Kronstadt' – who turned out to be an 'expert' employed under Trotsky's policy and playing no role in the rebellion. He does argue that the sailors who Lenin called 'the flower of the revolution' during 1917 had been dispersed and replaced by 'peasants' by 1921 – although Ida Mett had blown this legend sky high by 1927 when her 'Kronstadt Commune' detailed the histories of those involved and established the continuity Trotsky seeks to abolish.

Of course the peasant movement of the Ukraine was just that, a peasant movement. Yes, there were peasants involved in the Baltic fleet – both as 'the flower of the revolution' and as 'white guard conspirators' and 'backward peasants' (as Mett established, they were the same people in each case). An examination of the Makhnovist proclamations (12) and the demands of the Kronstadt Soviet as printed in the Kronstadt (revista 14) shows that in relation to the countryside even the most confused and backward of them were in advance of any raised inside the Bolshevik Party. Where the Kronstadters demanded socialist democracy – freedom to the soviets, and tied this to a move away from War Communism designed to encourage the self-mobilisation of the peasantry and its self-differentiation by means of freeing peasant labour from exploitation but denying it the right to employ others (i.e. to strengthen the poor and middle peasants) as in demands 8, 11, 12 of the Kronstadt Soviet resolution (14), the Bolshevik Party at its Tenth Party Congress, meeting at the same time as the rebellion and its crushing, began its move towards the New Economic Policy which meant a free hand for the red petty-bourgeois elements in the countryside, the Kulaks, and Goshk who were freed them to employ labour and develop agriculture through capitalist means. Today the Party was to spend the next seven years arguing about the limits of the forces it unleashed by NEP in 1921 and it is also irrefutable is that the policy of crushing the peasantry as a whole, inevitable in 1929, was a result of the prior destruction of all the tendencies towards socialist mobilisation of the peasantry.

The real poverty of the inner party debates

in the 1920s is obvious in the light of latter developments. This is particularly so on the question of the peasantry. Whatever the nature of the 'Kulak danger' or its counterpart 'tiding to socialism on a peasant nag' both ignored the basic fact of soviet agriculture – as Medvedev (Let History Judge) and Nowe (Economic History of the USSR) illustrate, the basic problem was a huge subsistence economy which grew throughout the period. Only between 13% (Stalin) and 21% (Moshkovic and Kozar) of all grain in 1927 was marketed. This proportion (a source of bitter argument over the importance or otherwise of the kulaks) changed very little over the period whilst the number of peasants' holdings steadily grew from 23 million in 1924 to 25 million in 1927 (Nowe p. 106, 110; Medvedev p. 73).

That the Chinese revolution and the subsequent success of collectivisation in China shows the possibility of other estimations of the peasantry and its capacity does not merely mean that hindsight gives us advantages. Such hindsight was not available to the Makhnovists or the Kronstadt revolutionaries. It was not available to earlier generations of Russian revolutionaries either, yet in 'Letters to a Frenchman' (in Maslennikov – Political Thought of Mikhail Bakunin) we find outlined a programme of mobilisation through mutual aid teams, radicalisation through peasant self-government, propaganda by advantageous trade from the towns to the country, and careful strictures against encouraging the individualism of the peasantry and pushing them into the arms of reaction. It is not only in the light of the peasant based national liberation struggles since the Chinese revolution (Vietnam, Angola etc.) that Bolshevik attitudes to the peasantry are found to be profoundly reactionary.

Confused in the suppression of the peasant and peasant-linked revolutionary movements (anarchist and left SR) is not just the mistaken estimation of the potential of these movements but the fear that they represented a threat to the Bolshevik monopoly of power (this is the core of Sergei's defence of the Party during this period – see Memoirs). At the centre of this fear was the Bolshevik conception of Party and class.

Lenin had argued the need for a democratic centralist Party because of the uneven development of the masses, the conditions of Tsarist repression and the origins of revolutionary theory outside the working class, among the intelligentsia. Trotsky had originally sided with the Mensheviks in opposition to Lenin's views as expounded in 'What is to be Done' and fought for at the Second Congress in 1903. His attack 'Our Political Task' (1904) argued that the logic of Lenin's conception was that the Party needs to take the place of the class, the Central Committee that of the Party and the leader that of the Central Committee. This view echoed that of Plekhanov (Call, Wks. Vol. 13 p. 317, cited in Carr: The Bolshevik Revolution Vol. 1, Penguin, p. 45), 'everything will in the last resort revolve around one man who, or providence! will unite all the powers in himself'.

That Trotsky regarded his opposition to Lenin on this as the greatest mistake of his life is evidenced not only by his later admission but also by the fact that during his lifetime he never gave permission for 'Our Political Tasks' to be reprinted. Whatever the subtleties and changed emphases of Lenin's subsequent works, in practice Lenin, and the Bolshevik tradition of his successors, tended to conflate the Party and the proletariat, e.g. On Compromises. 'Our Party, like any political party, is striving for political domination for itself. Our aim is the dictatorship of the revolutionary proletariat'.

Left Wing Communism: The mere presentation of the question 'dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class' testifies to the most incredible and hopelessly modified thinking

..... It is common knowledge ..... that in our case ..... classes are led by political parties'.

In dealing with the movements we have earlier mentioned (Makhno, Kronstadt) the twin conceptions of peasant incapacity for action as a socialist force and the exercise of power by the Bolshevik Party are actually being the dictatorship of the proletariat are dominant. The conflation further from class to Party to Central Committee is clearly outlined in Trotsky's report to the Second Congress of the Comintern. 'Today we have received from the Polish Government proposals for the conclusion of peace. Who decides this question? We have Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars), i.e. the government supposedly drawing its legitimacy from the Soviets) but it must be subject to a certain control. What control? The control of the working class as a formalised chaotic mass? No. The central committee of the Party has been called together to discuss the proposal and to decide whether to accept it' (Brinton's short book (The Bolsheviks and



Workers' Control 86 pp.) details the reason why the working class had become 'a formless chaotic mass' – all its organs of democratic power had strangled (soviets) or had actually been obstructed in their attempts at federation and national organisation (factory committee movement).

Lenin was fond of likening anyone breaking Party discipline to 'strikebreaking'. Trotsky's position throughout his fight against Stalin and Bukharin (earlier allied with Zinoviev and Kamenev) was crippled tactically by this assumption. He not only accepted the suppression of Lenin's 'Testament' by the 15th Congress but was forced to denounce as a lie Eastman's publication of the document – a move on his behalf (see Carr: The Interregnum, pp. 266-7, 271; Socialism in One Country, Vol. 2, pp. 74-76; Foundations of a Planned Economy, Vol. 2, p. 17). He maintained this attitude throughout the debates of the 20s. 'The Real Situation in Russia' 1929, p. 129 'It goes without saying that, after the adoption of a decision, it is carried out with iron Bolshevik discipline'. Many of the favoured quotations of Trotskyist journals used for the inflation of their own organisations date from the period before exile ('Red Flag' is a mine of such gems). 'Without the Party we are nothing, with the Party we are everything' 'It is impossible to be right against the Party' (Shades of Sergei's 'Case of Comrade Tulayev' and Koester's 'Darkness at Noon').





the arguments of the 'bureaucratic collectivists', "the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime. The inability of the proletariat to take into its hands the leadership of society could actually lead under these conditions to the growth of a new exploiting class from the Bonapartist fascist bureaucracy". (p.18 has a similar view). Trotsky adopts this simple dichotomy workers state/revolution or decay/a new class society as a means to undermine the arguments of the 'bureaucratic collectivists' (principally Rizz). But his posing of simple choices as in this case and in the latter view that the war could only mean revolution or the restoration of capitalism act only to obscure any real crisis which for him is purely a transitory, parasitic growth produced by the backwardness of the Russian economy and the failure of the world's working class. At such a level of generalisation the specific nature of the bureaucracy is a small question.

Trotsky's generalisations stand in the way of more precise considerations of the formations and categories he considers. This applies to his central concept that socialism is nationalised property relations. The concept is totally ahistorical, corporate/state forms of property abound throughout history (Roman Armoury manufactures, the properties of the medieval church or the 'colonising' military orders eg. Teutonic Knights in East Prussia, Lithuania, Poland; to the present 'mixed economies' with varying 'nationalised' contents.) What distinguishes the various examples are specific social relations and relations of production proper to each.

Trotsky's emphasis on the legal relations and on the 'transitory' nature of the bureaucratic superstructure of the Soviet Union ignores the totality of its class relations; the lack of self-management of the producers; the system of hierarchy, one man management; the contrast between privilege and piece rate (see Harzati, A Worker in a Workers State, Penguin). It is simply to turn historical materialism on its head to seek an explanation at the level of legal relations or in the functioning of the state superstructure alone.

The limits of Trotsky's critique of the USSR are today being demonstrated by their reappearance in the work of modern 'eurocommunists' where they serve to separate the authors from the bureaucracy without fundamentally challenging it as anything more than a deviation or 'degeneration' forced by circumstances. Mandel's criticisms of this school, particularly Ellenstein, in From Stalinism to Eurocommunism, can be applied quite closely to Trotsky himself (see espec. Ch.4 A New Approach to Stalinism.)

In order to maintain its position as a revolutionary opponent of the soviet bureaucracy Trotskyism has had to create distance between itself and Trotsky. This is nowhere clearer than in the Theses on Socialist Democracy (which if anything tends too far towards pluralism) of the

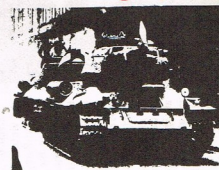
USFI, and in Mandel's substitution of the phrase 'society in transition' for 'workers state' (particularly marked in From Stalinism . . .) This evolution is a symptom of Trotsky's weakness on the problems of Party and class and on Stalinism and the class nature of the USSR.

#### Footnotes.

1. *Third International After Lenin* p.19 "Capitalism structures the entire world economy and it operates by its own methods", that is to say by anarchistic methods which constantly undermine its own work, set one country against another, and one branch of industry against another, developing some parts of the world economy while throwing back the development of others."
2. *Revolution Betrayed*. p.5. "In the conditions of capitalist decline, backward countries are unable to attain that level which the old centres of capitalism have attained. Having themselves arrived in a blind alley, the highly civilised nations block the road to those in the process of civilisation. Russia took the road of proletarian revolution not because her economy was the first to become ripe for a socialist change, but because she could not develop further on a capitalist basis."
3. *Revolution Betrayed* p.11. "Socialisation of the means of production had become a necessary condition for bringing the country out of barbarism."
4. *Deutscher Prophet Armed*. p.96. E.H.Carr Foundations of a Planned Economy Vol.1 p.283.
5. Standard in marxist-leninist work but also common in Trotskyists eg. Livio Maitan, *Party, Army and Masses in China*. NLB.
6. Plekhanov. In *Defence of Materialism* (titled for the censors *On the Question of the development of the Monist View of History*) 1892/3; P.B.Struve, *Critical Notes on the Problems of the Economic Development of Russia*. 1894; Lenin, *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (written 1896 published 1899).
7. Penguin. *The Young Lenin*. p.85.
- 7a. *The Spanish Revolution 1931-39*. Pathfinder 1973. pp.251, 252, 321.
8. Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*; Sam Dolgoff, *The Anarchist Collectives*; F.Mintz, *Autogestion dans l'Espagne Revolutionnaire*.
9. Carr, *The Interregnum* p.23-4, 317.
10. Carr, *FPE* vol.1 p.29.
11. *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38*. Pathfinder. Letter to Wendelin Thomas.
12. Arshinov. *History of the Makhnovist Movt. Black and Red*. Detroit. 1975. p.265-275, *Makhnovist proclamations*.
13. Arshinov, see above. Voline. *The Unknown Revolution, Black and Red*. Detroit. 1974. Avrich. *Kronstadt 1921*, and also *The Russian Anarchists*.
14. Voline. p.473-5.

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